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AN

EPIC POEM,

IN

TWENTY-FOUR BOOKS.

BY

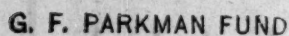
JOSEPH COTTLE.

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EPIC POEM

41

TWENTY-FOUR BOOKS.

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PREFACE.

THE following poem commences when Alfred was in the depth of his distress, and concludes when the Danes received their great overthrow at Edington.

It is unnecessary to expatiate on the well-known character of Alfred. By the general concurrence of mankind, he has been ranked among the most illustrious of commanders, legislators, and monarchs; distinguished in private life for every thing which was amiable, and in public for all that was great; the admiration of other countries, and the peculiar glory of our own.

From a persuasion that the modern writers of epic poetry have been influenced too much by custom, in almost universally recurring, to machinery, battles, classical allusions;

and supernatural agency; these, except in the first book, I have wholly rejected. If such auxiliaries have ever been resorted to with advantage, that advantage is now diminished, from the frequency of their use, and the little diversity of their effect. It has not been sufficiently insisted upon, that we should estimate that, at a low rate, which is attainable by all.

Heroic poems generally display a sameness of mythological reference;—exhibit disgusting representations of war and slaughter;—the agency of beings which we know do not exist; and, in some instances, the most flagrant violation of physical laws. With all deference to the authority of those works, in whose favour the public have decided, it yet remains to be ascertained, whether these peculiarities may not often be considered as excrescences, and whether even the most venerable productions of genius, have not derived their chief value from their approximation to the beautiful in nature, which includes, simplicity, feeling, and truth.

If the extravagant and miraculous have hitherto been tolerated, in natural characters, it may be doubted, whether such tolerance be not the concession of a vicious taste. The age appears to be drawing near, when the principles of poetic pleasure will be more accurately investigated; when that which has been long established will be distin-

guished from that which is essential, and when Poetry will be divested of those appendages which have limited her usefulness by rendering her too frequently contemptible in the eye of Philosophy. The unchangeable, inexhaustible, and only true sources of interest, are our feelings and passions. With this conviction, I have been more solicitous to find an avenue to the heart, than to invent systems of machinery, or to wander in tracks, however luxuriant, where the effect is less legitimate and durable, in proportion as the events are less assimilated to human life and manners.

The dramatic poet possesses one great advantage over the epic, from having it in his power, by a well-constructed plot, to conceal the final event, and, by the unexpected transition of incidents, to arrest and sustain the attention. The writer of an epic poem, on the contrary, by his exordium, declares the catastrophe: and although this part were to be omitted, yet, the established rule of success in the termination, would leave the reader in no doubt respecting that issue, which, 'till the proper moment arrives, ought not even to be suspected. There is no way of effectually counteracting this evil, but it may be lessened, in some measure, by a recurrence to the dramatic liberty, and the forming of a secondary plot, where the result cannot so well be anticipated, and where the subordinate interest, from possessing novelty, may add vigor to the attention by occasionally relieving it.

I have attempted this in the captivity of Alswitha, and its consequent events; and I believe by exhibiting the conjugal affection in its purity, I have had a more dignified passion to develope, and have been likely to produce a better effect than could be accomplished by any display of the earlier and more romantic attachments. I was in some measure influenced to this choice, from the hope of counteracting, in a small degree, the influence of those writers, particularly the dramatic, who (to the great injury of society, as well as sacrifice of truth, and with an uniformity not very honorable to their invention) delight in representing profound misery as the almost invariable attendant on the marriage state.

My deviation in the first book, from the rules which I had prescribed to myself, arose from the peculiar scope to the imagination which the wildness of the Gothic superstitions afforded. But although this book is intimately connected with the rest, I am not satisfied whether it will not be considered by many, as a defect, rather than an excellence, from being of so opposite a nature to the remainder of the poem. The preceptive part of the twenty-third book may also appear objectionable in diverting the attention too much from the general narration. I must however be excused in saying, that, although this part pretends not to novelty, I am too happy, in having an opportunity to recommend the sentiments it contains, to suffer myself to be influenced by inferior considerations.

The turbulent and ferocious character of the ancient Dane has never yet been exhibited in poetry. From possessing a distinct contrast to that of the Anglo-Saxon, it afforded a large field for accurate delineation. Whether I have rightly conceived or mistaken that character, the reader must determine.

As I have been unable, in many instances to satisfy myself, so I cannot believe that in all particulars I shall satisfy others; I however expect candour:—the difficulty of supporting, through so long a poem, the simple voice of nature, when she frowns and when she smiles;—of arranging characters, and distinguishing each by a series of appropriate actions;—of maintaining perspicuity at all times;—of introducing that variety of pause in the versification which shall destroy monotonous harmony without degenerating into harshness;—of preserving an uniform elevation of style;—of sustaining the interest, and, finally, of producing a consistent whole—every reflecting reader will be able to appreciate. Many connecting parts admit of no other merit than that of not being bad; and fortunate is he who can display, on inferior occasions, the utmost which his subject afforded, and, when the latitude is greater, can uniformly attain to his own ideas of excellence.

If, from what I intended to perform, I can judge of that which is accomplished, the following poem will exhibit much of the spirit of the drama, in the pause, language,

and arrangement; as well as in the nature and extent of the dialogue. But, from that part of my design which admitted more of dialogue than has been usual in the epic poem, what, I conceive, has been added to the interest, I am afraid, in some instances, has been subtracted from the composition; for, independently of the necessary repetition of particular words, it requires but little consideration to perceive, that when a writer speaks in his own person, as he does in description, he may assume a more lofty tone than when he ascribes sentiments to those whose language cannot be other than simple without verging on the bombast. This observation applies to some other passages, but a more particular reference is made to the cottage scenes, in the fourth and fifth books. If I had entirely formed the plan, without being guided by history, it is probable that none of these scenes would have appeared; but Alfred's assuming the character of the Neatherd, having been so remarkable an incident in his life, I had no alternative but that of combining it with other circumstances, so as to produce the best effect in my power.

From the disadvantages, however, to which dramatic writing is subject, I have been in some measure relieved, by the opportunity I had of occasionally introducing that imagery in the speeches of Sigbert, which was consistent with his enthusiasm and the impetuosity of his spirit. Of this privilege I have availed myself, in a still greater degree, with

respect to the Danes; whose familiar language, in the eighth and ninth centuries, abounded much in poetry; whilst their imaginations were divested of those fetters which clog the sober dialogue of the moderns.

My own confidence in the following poem, is considerably lessened, when I compare what I have done, with what I had hoped to do; but whatever defects may be imputed to me, I hope it will be admitted, that I have endeavoured to support the cause of Religion and Virtue, in comparison of which, all other commendation I esteem of little value.

JOSEPH COTTLE.

BRISTOL, August 1, 1800.

CHARACTERS.

SAXON.

ALFRED, *King of England.*

ALSWITHA, *his Queen.*

ODDUNE, *Earl of Devon.*

SIGBERT, *Abbot of Wilton.*

CEOLRIC *the Neatberd.*

ACCA, *his Wife.*

DANISH.

IVAR, } *Sons of REGNER LODBROG, King of Denmark, who was*
HUBBA, } *murdered by ELLA, King of Northumberland.*

GUTHRUM, *an old Danish General.*

ALFRED. BOOK I.

SCENE, DENMARK.

ARGUMENT.

IVAR, the evening before he departs from Denmark with new forces to attack England, goes to consult the Oracle. Kills a Mariner. How punished by the illusions of the Witch. Swears never to take away the life of any unarmed person in the Island to which he is going. Departs for Britain.

ALFRED victorious o'er the Danes, I sing.

Prepared to seek again' the Saxon shore,
Within his Father's halls IVAR now sat,
Musing on future spoils. Around him throng'd
His wrathful Sisters, rousing up his heart 5
To vengeance 'gainst the race who slew their Sire.²
At REGNER's name, IVAR uprose, his eye
Beam'd fearful indignation, when he cried,

¹ Ivar and Hubba had long ravaged Britain, when the former returned to Denmark to collect new forces. It is the Evening prior to his departure from Denmark with which the Poem opens.

² The Father of Ivar and Hubba was Regner Lodbrog, King of Denmark, uniting (as was not uncommon in that age) the characters of Warrior, Poet, and Pirate. He reigned in Denmark the beginning of the ninth century. "After a long series of maritime expeditions into the most distant Seas, his fortune at length failed him in England; taken prisoner by his adversary, Ella, King of Northumberland, he perished by the bite of Serpents, with which they had filled the Dungeon he was confined in. War in those rude ages was carried on with the same inhumanity which it is at present amongst the Savages of America: their Prisoners were only reserved to be put to death with torture.—Accordingly Regner was destroyed by Serpents. While dying, he composed a Song, wherein he records all the valiant achievements of his life, and threatens the Saxons with the vengeance of his sons, Ivar and Hubba."

" Death to our Foes ! my spirit thirsts to see
 " The blood of Saxons flowing, ocean like, 10
 " Before my greedy eyes, whilst ever round
 " Some grinning corse shall stare at me, and raise
 " A fellow grin. ODIN !³ I hear thy voice,
 " And like thee, forth I go, to scorn the looks,
 " And scatter wide the bones, and heap the skulls 15
 " Of vanquish'd enemies. Death ! view in me

³ In the course of the Poem it will be necessary to make frequent references to the Mythology of the North, and as it will prevent other Notes on the same subject, I shall here give a brief account of Odin, as I shall of the other parts of that Mythology when the passages arise to which they refer.

All the Chronicles and Traditions of the North confirm the opinion, that formerly a great person of the name of Odin reigned there; that he occasioned changes in the laws, manners, and religion of those nations, and that divine honors were paid him after death. The most credited account of Odin is the following. When Mithridates had been defeated by Pompey, he fled to the borders of Scythia, and among other alliances to oppose the Roman Power, applied to Odin, whose dominions lay between the Euxine and Caspian Seas. The assistance he gave Mithridates not having been sufficient to oppose the victorious Pompey, and by the part he had taken, having exposed his own kingdom, he travelled into the northern regions of Europe to obtain that safety which he could not expect in the neighbourhood of the offended Romans. Odin's real name was Sigge, but on leading his army towards the North, he assumed that of Odin, the title of the supreme God among the Scythians, in order to encrease his authority with the Nations he intended to subject. He is not to be understood as identifying himself with the Deity, whose name he had adopted, he only pretended to be inspired by him, and to be the Oracle by which the God Odin communicated his will to man. This distinction however was soon lost, and in after ages he was regarded as the Deity himself. Odin subdued in succession all the nations of the North, and gave the throne of each kingdom to one of his sons, thus SUARLAME was made king over part of Russia, BALDEG over the western parts of Saxony, SEGDEG over eastern Saxony, and SIGGE over Franconia. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Lapland received other of his sons for their kings. Odin is represented as the most eloquent of men. To him is ascribed the introduction of the art of poetry among the Scandinavians, as well as the art of writing or Runic characters. He taught his followers that he could overrun the world in the twinkling of an eye; that the tempests were subject to him, that he could assume all shapes, raise the dead, foretel future events; by enchantment disarm his enemies, and discover treasures hid in the earth. He was also said by the power of harmony to make the plains and mountains expand with delight, whilst ghosts, leaving their infernal abodes, listened enraptured. He was also believed to be capable of assuming in battle, the form of a bear, bull or lion, and of performing prodigies of valour, himself defended

" Thy proudest Champion, soon ordain'd to swell
 " Slaughter's rank pile, and for the ravenous wolves
 " Provide new banquets ! By the rapturous hope
 " Of one day joining the celestial throng 20
 " Amid Valhalla,⁴ hearing as I stalk,
 " From each brave Warrior, gratulations loud ;—
 " By that eternal hope, here do I swear
 " To scorn all mercy ! Let the Christian⁵ shew
 " The pitying heart, and hesitate to strike 25
 " The prostrate victim.⁶ Him no thoughts inspire

from harm. Having lived for many years the most triumphant of conquerors, and finding old age draw near, he assembled his followers, and determining to die the hero he had lived, with a lance pierced his body in the form of a circle in nine places, and when expiring, informed his attendants, he was then going to the halls of Valhalla, (see Note 4) there to become an immortal God and to prepare joys for the valiant. He taught them, that the Gods would reject all who died not in war, or by their own hands ; that the felicities they would receive hereafter would be proportioned to the courage they displayed in battle, and to the number of enemies they had slain, out of whose skulls they were to drink their mead. That such a faith should have enabled the Scandinavians to produce the changes in Europe which it did, and finally to triumph over Rome herself, ought not to excite our surprize.

4 The Danes belieyed in two places of rewards, VALHALLA and GIMLE, and in two places of punishment, NIFLHEIM and NASTROND. In VALHALLA the heroes spent the day in martial sports, and the night in feasting on the Boar Scrimner, attended by beautiful young virgins. All brave and good men were to remain here until the end of the world, when the heavens and the earth, and even the Gods themselves were to be consumed by fire ; after this general conflagration, a new and more beautiful world was to arise out of the ashes of the former, named GIMLE ; here all good and brave men were to dwell for ever, being a palace built of shining gold. NIFLHEIM, or the abode of evil, was governed by HELA, whose palace was anguish, her table famine, her waiters expectation and delay, the threshold of her door precipice, her bed leanness, whilst her looks struck terror into all beholders. After the general destruction, there was to be another place of punishment far more dreadful than Niflheim, called NASTROND, built with the carcasses of serpents, where the bad were eternally to remain.

5 The Danes not only knew the distinction of Christian, but bore the Saxons on that account an additional animosity.

6 Alfred had discovered at all times, great lenity to his Danish prisoners ; the Danes on the contrary, uniformly exercised the greatest barbarities to their Saxon captives. It was not

" Of coming recompence, when ODIN's voice
 " Shall sound through every world, whilst all the ghosts
 " Of untold ages, croud around the thrones
 " Of valiant Spirits : when the God shall cry, 20
 " Let him who slew the most, approach, and join
 " Our blissful mansions." At that glorious hour
 " Ivar with pride shall claim the heritage
 " Reserved for valor. On the Saxon's head
 " Curses for ever light ! Be their land veil'd 25
 " In everlasting darkness ! May their hearts,
 " While unconsumed, Muspelsheim's fires o'erwhelm !⁷
 " Soon shall this sword to the infernal worlds
 " Send such an army that all Neflheim's sons
 " Shall rise in triumph ; clap their wither'd hands, 30
 " And, gazing on their Brethren, shout my praise !
 " Sisters ! in whom the blood of REGNER flows,
 " You hear my oath ! From Denmark I depart
 " To scourge my Father's Murderers."

" Wilt thou go,"

THORILDA⁸ cried, " ere thou the Sorceress seek,⁹
 " That under the black mountain rests her head,

unusual for the Danes to make a vow to Odin, before the commencement of an engagement, that if he would grant them success, they would offer to him all their prisoners, on which occasions they were indiscriminately slaughtered.

⁷ Muspelsheim, a flaming world in the South, from which incessantly flowed torrents of sparkling fire.

⁸ One of the three Sisters of Ivar and Hubba.

⁹ For many centuries, in the North, no war, or business of importance was undertaken, without first consulting wizards, witches, soothsayers, and fortune tellers, on whose decision the most implicit reliance was placed. The northern people also regarded divination, by the

" To whom all times are known ? Raise not the sword,
 " And rashly dare the combat, till thou first
 " Consult the Oracle.¹⁰ Proud HADRIN once¹¹ 40
 " Disdain'd the words of OTHIN, when he said
 " Meet not CURETUR, tyrant as he is,
 " Or thou shalt be his captive. Soon the King
 " Bewail'd his rashness. Be thou wise, and learn
 " From his disaster how to hold the power 45
 " Of Spells and Prophets."

Thus the Prince replied.

" Far other thoughts, THORILDA! have I learn'd
 " From her who bore me,¹² than the impious wish

air, by the earth, by the fire, by the dead, and all dreams, if they seemed to concern the common-wealth. They were also guided on all important occasions, by examining entrails, water-works, lots and signs, the exhalations of mountains, the flight and singing of birds, and the leaping of fish. The Danes also, had another superstition. When they designed to declare war against an enemy, " they sat their spears before the temple of their Gods, and a horse supposed to be sacred, was led out. If he first put his right foot foremost, the omen was supposed to be good, but if on the contrary he stepped with his left foot, the omen was esteemed unlucky, and the design abandoned. This horse was kept constantly in the temple, and was supposed to be ridden upon by Odin when he assisted them in battle. This the people could not in the least doubt, for after a successful battle, the horse was found entirely in a foam. But it is to be remarked, the priests alone had the care of the horse, and none dared to approach the place where he was without permission. Other countries have been distinguished for like superstitions, but it is indisputable that the gothic nations were more so than any other."

¹⁰ The northern nations had their Oracles, like the people of Italy and Greece. It was generally believed that the Gods and Goddesses, or the three destinies, presided in these places. The Oracle of Upsal was the most famous in the North, independently of which there were others much celebrated in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, as well as among the Parcae and other tribes.

¹¹ Othin, a famous soothsayer, being consulted by Hadrin, King of Denmark, whether he should war with Curetur, a neighbouring tyrant, answered, if he did he would be taken prisoner. The king rejecting his advice, it happened to him as the soothsayer had predicted.

¹² Ivar's mother was named *Thora*, the daughter of a Swedish prince. In former times when so many fierce warriors were roaming through the countries of the North, young wo-

" To scorn the Gods immortal, who to some 50
 " Have given prophetic wisdom ! Well I know
 " Where divination dwells ! On the next morn,
 " I sail for Britain ! Dreary now the hour !
 " The night is dark, and chilling blows the wind
 " O'er the vex'd ocean ! yet, a heart I boast 55
 " That never stoop'd to fear ; a mailed heart,
 " Invincible ! and forth I go, e'en now
 " To learn my fortunes." Instant he arose
 And to the neighbouring beach undaunted sped.

Thick darkness veil'd the sky, the tempest howl'd. 60
 As o'er the shore he strode, he saw a man,—
 A Mariner. " Well met," said IVAR," swift
 " Launch out thy bark ! for I am bound to find
 " The Witch's habitation. Dost thou know
 " Her secret dwelling ?" " Well I know the spot— 65
 " Her secret dwelling," spake the mariner :
 " But, hark ! the winds are rising ; see the waves
 " Heaving their monstrous heads ! At such an hour
 " 'Twere death to venture." Cried the indignant Chief,
 " Thou dastard spirit, know, thy Prince is nigh ! 70
 " 'Tis IVAR's voice thou hearest. Launch thy bark !"

men of rank and beauty were considered by their friends as unsafe, unless placed in a strong castle and defended by some man of tried courage. Thora's father had entrusted her to the guardianship of one of his officers, who falling in love with his ward, refused to resign her : on which the father made it known that whoever subdued him should receive his daughter as a reward. Young Regner Lodbrog, who was not less distinguished for his gallantry, than his warlike achievements, immediately accepted the offer, and proved as successful in this, as he had been in all his other enterprizes. Thora dying some years after, Regner married a shepherdess named Aslauga, whom he saw by accident on the coast of Norway.

The man replied. "I, other master serve,
"No choice is mine, I must deny thy will,
"And, patient, tread this shore." Deny thy Prince!"
IVAR, enraged, exclaim'd, when, with his sword 75
He smote him in the neck. The Mariner
Fell lifeless, and the Prince pursued his way.
Not long he stray'd ere to another man—
A Mariner he came, who pondering stood,
"Well met," cried IVAR. "I am bound to find 80
"The Witch's habitation: launch thy bark!"
The mariner in silence launch'd his bark,
And o'er the boisterous seas urged his bold course.

Now darker grew the crowded atmosphere.
There was no moon on high, and not a star 85
Peep'd through the sable canopy: the blast
Rung loud, and now, with roar more terrible,
Swept o'er the foaming waves.

"But dost thou know,
"In this tempestuous hour, the certain course?" 90
Said IVAR, as the spray dash'd in his face.
Solemn, the Helms-man cry'd—"I know the course."
More furious howl'd the storm, and in the air
So black and pitchy, forms appear'd to float,
More black, and of terrific character. 95
"But, dost thou know the way?" the Prince again
Inquired earnest. Slow the Boat-man spake
"I know the way." A moment's calm prevail'd;
The mountain billows seem'd to hold their heads

Suspended in the clouds, to aid the still 100
And petrifying silence ; then again
They fall in thundering cataracts ; the winds
Burst on resistless, and, together join
Ocean and air t'augment the fearful scene,
Unspeakable ! " But dost thou know the way ?" 105
Once more inquired the Prince. " I know the way"
In the same tone the mariner replied.
The sea now raved with more transcendent wrath,
And every blast that shook the element
Seem'd like the blast portentous of man's end. 110
" I cannot see thy face" exclaim'd the Prince,
" And whither are we sailing ? Speak one word,
" Though it may bear a dagger to my heart,
" This horrid silence chills me." Not a word
Heard IVAR, but he look'd in earnestness, 115
When, sudden there appear'd upon the face
Of him who row'd him, light ineffable,
And by it, in the Helms-man he beheld—
The man he murder'd !

Ghastly beam'd his eye; 120
His cheek was thin and sallow, and the wound
Deep in his neck with which he smote him, clear
The Prince discerned; and as he speechless gazed,
The light withdrew, and all again was dark,
Darkness and tempest, and the rushing wind. 125

Now fast they sped o'er ocean, when a wave
Toss'd on a rock the bark. It instant bulged.

Upon the rock Ivar up-climbed, and look'd,
 Eager around, for shore or shelter; when
 Terror consumed his breast; he fear'd the prize, 130
 Th' immortal prize for which alone he toil'd,
 Was then to be caught from him, and the flood
 Receive that heart which panted but to die
 The death of heroes.

Whilst the Prince thus mused, 135
 A light drew nigh; and now it nearer came,
 And still more near! The cause was manifest;
 It was a wandering Night-hag pacing slow¹³
 The dark and stormy billows. Ivar cried,

¹³ Magicians and Soothsayers, in the North, were believed to have the power of walking over the sea with the same ease they could dry land. Holler the magician, professed to have voyaged over many parts of the ocean on a bone. Oddo also, a Dane, would wander alone over the sea, and he asserted he could raise and allay storms, and destroy at pleasure the whole of an enemy's fleet. Both of these were killed by other magicians more powerful than themselves. Othin (of whom mention was made Note 11) is said, in one of his maritime excursions, to have discovered King Hadrin, riding on a horse many leagues at sea, where he had been conveyed by magical incantations. He destroyed the spell and conducted him back to the shore, and on his way, bestowed upon him the power of seeing the impression of the horse's feet in the water, with which the king professed himself much delighted. The power of these Magicians, was believed to be almost unbounded. They could cast mists before people's eyes so as to represent themselves or others in which light they thought proper. An old historian has gravely given the following account of the power of necromancers, with the mode of receiving the supernatural communications. "They that desire to know the state of their friends or foes, at a very great distance from them, five hundred be it, or a thousand miles off, they inquire of a Laplander or Finlander, &c. who is skilled in this matter, giving him a gift (namely, some linen garment or a girdle) to be told where their friends or foes are, and what they do: whereupon he goes into his conclave, content with one companion, and his wife, and he beats upon a frog of brass or serpent, with a hammer, so many strokes as are prescribed, and by mumbling of charms he turns it up and down, and presently falling, he is ravished into an ecstasy, and he lies a short time as if he were dead. In the mean time, he is safely guarded by his aforesaid companion, lest any living creature, gnat or fly, or other animal might touch him; with the power of his charms, his spirit, by the misleading of the devils, brings from far some token (namely, a ring or a knife) for a testimony of his embassy or commission fulfilled, and presently rising up, he declares the same signs to him that hired

"Whate'er thou art, oh roamer of the seas! 140
 "Approach and aid me." Toward the Prince she moved,
 And raised her glimmering lamp, by whose pale ray
 He saw his perils. With inquiring gaze
 He sought for boat or boatman, but in vain;
 Through the thick gloom no form appear'd, and now 145
 O'er broken crags, and sea-weeds, to the shore,
 Labouring, he climb'd.

He mark'd the ocean Hag,
 And started back. Her face was of the shade
 Of embers, and her bones, scarce hid by skin 150
 That loosely cover'd them. Her eye, the eye
 Of swine, when from half sleep it wakes, and casts
 In lazy mood its glistening eye-ball up
 At foot approaching.

"Hither am I come," 155
 Cried IVAR, "to explore the sacred haunt
 "Of the great Fatal-Sister. Her I seek
 "To commune with upon adventures, bold,
 "And to inquire, in other worlds how fares

him, with the rest of the circumstances." The power of the witches also was very great, as will be perceived, by what is asserted of Hugbert the daughter of Vagnost the giant, who it was believed could change her posture at pleasure. Sometimes she was very large, at other times diminutive, sometimes withered-faced, sometimes beautiful, sometimes as tall as a tree, then again as short as a pigmy; she was even believed to have the power of pulling down the heavens and of lifting up the earth; she could harden fountains, melt mountains, lift ships from the sea, extinguish the stars, and make hell a light place. There were innumerable other females who were famous for the like endowments. No power was so generally professed by the magicians of the North as that of allaying and exciting storms. Ericus, the nephew of Regner Lodbrog, was considered as inferior to none in his time for an acquaintance with the magical art, and so familiar was he with the evil spirits, whom he exceedingly adored, that which way soever he turned his cap, the wind immediately blew from the same quarter.

BOOK I.

11

" My injured Father.¹⁴ I am REGNER'S son, 160
 " IVAR of Denmark. Know'st thou of her cave,
 " That I may pay obeisance, and disclose
 " My weighty purpose ?"

" Well I know the spot,
 The Hag replied. " From her thou seek'st, I sprang—
 " My potent Mother. I beheld thee, far 165
 " Toiling amid the waves, and thus approach'd
 " To serve thee. To our vault repair ! but first,
 " In such a boisterous hour, inform who steer'd
 " Thy vessel hither ?" Trembling, IVAR cried,
 " Some haggard fiend, I know him not, his name, 170
 " Nor whither he is gone : he landed me
 " Upon these savage rocks, and back return'd."
 " It was our nightly herald," said the Hag ;
 " Him we dispatch'd to bring thee to our dome,
 " And thou didst right to follow. 175

" Now advance
 " T'explore the depth profound where I abide
 " In service evermore (save, when I aid
 " The suffering Mariner) with ceaseless care
 " Guarding all avenues, that lead, where dwells 180
 " The sleeping Sorceress. Mortal, follow me !"
 Slowly she strode, whilst IVAR follow'd close.
 As thus they moved, sudden a host of lamps
 Uncall'd, and of most fearful radiance
 Blazed all around.

* Though Regner had been a brave warrior, yet not having died in battle, nor by his own hands, Ivar might feel some solicitude concerning his future welfare.

The spot on which he stood, 185
Was the rude base of a stupendous rock,
Whose summit, midnight hid ; whilst here and there
The fatal hemlock started, and the roots
Of living mandrake. " Are we not come near ?
Cried IVAR ; " these most hideous shapes and things, 190
" It needeth to be one like thee to meet
" Unterrified." They both in silence march'd.
The torches bright, high in the rifted crag,
Moved on by hand unseen ; 'till to a vault
Of huge extent, and darkness—tenfold more 195
Than earthly, both arrived ; when all the lamps
Blended their fires, and, as one torch, approach'd
The Night-hag, who her skinny hand upheld,
And, having seiz'd it, bent before the cave,
And mutter'd unintelligible words, 200
And necromantic airs that made the place
Ring like contending thunders.

" Now prepare",
Solemn she cried, " to tread these chambers, hid
" In night eternal, which no mortal foot 205
" Hath e'er profaned, but, with the special grace
" Of her who dwells beneath, our potent Queen."
The Hag proceeded. Doubtful stood the Prince
Whether to follow, or that instant rush—
He knew not where, but, mindful of his name, 210
Boldly he trod her footsteps.

On they moved
Through caverns intricate, and lofty vaults,

Where bats and screech-owls and the carrion-crow
 Had their safe dwelling; ever flitting by, 215
 Or sending sounds, reverberated far
 O'er all the black domain, that made the light
 Half conscious of obtrusion. To the mouth
 Of a deep pit they came. Fearless the Hag
 Leap'd downward half her length, standing secure 220
 Upon a jutting stone that overhung
 Th' abyss, yawning beneath: when, at her call
 From every secret crevice, issued fast
 Unnumber'd vipers!¹⁵ round the rocky sides,
 As by mechanic impulse each appear'd 225
 Ranged in due order, piercing the hard crag
 With fangs, monstrous, and keen, and down they hang,
 Coiling, when thus the Hag: "Young Prince, descend!
 "The steps are distant and impassable,
 "But by one only means: yon beings grasp, 230
 "And with their aid, dauntless proceed!

The Prince

Leap'd where the Hag had stood, and when to go
 Another step, he touch'd the slimy snakes,
 His hands recoil'd, and, for a moment, fear 235
 Shot through his blood. The Hag look'd up and cried.
 "Doth IVAR shake?" think of thy Father's fame,
 "And journey on unterrified." He now

¹⁵ When the Gods were about to launch the ship which contained the dead body of Balder, they found their insufficiency, and sent for a certain sorceress from the country of the giants, who came to them mounted on a wolf, and having twisted serpents for her bridle.

Beheld her pass; behind he look'd and saw
Impenetrable midnight, and before, 240
A gulf of depth unknown, whose mouth sent forth
Murmurs and wailing sounds. The single torch
Descended slow, whilst from beneath was heard
The same unceasing call, faint and more faint,
"Dauntless, proceed!" It was no time for thought, 245
When, grasping hard the scaly snakes, he sprang
From broken step to step, from rock to rock,
And soon his guide o'ertook, who downward still
Moved slowly with her blue and glimmering light.

Strange horrors shook his frame, he saw the light, 250
The only light caught by some Demon hand,
Gigantic, and, as shuddering he beheld,
It fell, and all was darkness. Tottering now
'Tween earth and NIFLHEIM deep, the Prince, a chill,
A cold and numbing chill through all his frame 255
Felt creeping, as on either side, he look'd
Yet nothing saw, whilst to his ear there came
One sound alone, his own fast throbbing heart
Raising faint echoes.

Now on earth he stood, 260
If name it might receive, when all was veil'd,
And blank uncertainty. In this suspense
And tumult of dismay, his quivering arm
Some unseen being seized! It led him on
He could not choose—he follow'd, 'till at length 265
The hand withdrew, when through the air there rose

A dull and bubbling noise, from some near tide
That wound 'mid scatter'd crags its sullen wave.

Whilst thus immured in darkness, unconceived,
Unutterable, making even life 270
Seem death disguised: silent and half perceiv'd,
A boat drew nigh the shore, parting the stream
With gentle motion, that a dubious light,
Unwelcomed cast around. "Why laggest thou?"
Exclaimed the Hag, who by him stood unseen, 275
"Leap fearless to the bark!"—The Prince obey'd,
He plung'd into the flood! no boat was there!
Instant the Hag, her hand, stretch'd and uprais'd
The struggling Prince, and on firm land again
He stands, unknowing how. IVAR look'd round! 280
Once more he sees his guide, when thus she spake.
"This stream is GIOLL! through the infernal worlds
"Rolling his dark tide, whom no ray of heaven
"Hath ever lighted on, or venturous being
"Touch'd and survived, save thou, and such as thou, 285
"Favor'd of spirits kind. The waster Death,
"When tired of dogging his three ministers,
"Famine, and War and Pestilence, here hastes
"And, plunging in this stream again revives
"His appetite for slaughter. 290

"Now behold
"These unexplored domains." She scarce had said,
When two huge doors of adamant flew wide,
And to his view displayed the secret vault

Where divination dwelt.¹⁶

300

Spacious it was,
And in the centre stood a cauldron. Fires,
Crimson and purple, streaming upward, spread
Throughout the scene a lustre, blazing now,
Now half extinguished, though the chill air blew 305
And all was damp and dreary. To the roof

¹⁶ The witches commonly resided alone and were visited, yet on particular occasions they would sometimes condescend to attend others. (See also Note 9.) We have the following account of a Danish witch, who at the request of Earl Thorchill, came to him to give information respecting the continuance of a sickness and famine, that reigned in the land. "After he had made all preparations which were usual for the reception of such an honorable guest, the witch arrived. A seat was prepared for the prophetess, raised some steps above the other seats, and covered with a cushion stiffened with hen's feathers. When she arrived on an evening, conducted by the messengers; she was dressed in a gown of green cloth, buttoned from top to bottom, she had a string of glass beads about her neck, and her head was covered with the skin of a black lamb, lined with the skin of a white cat: her shoes were made of calves skin, with the hair on it, tied with thongs, and fastened with brass buttons: on her hands she had a pair of gloves, of a white cat's skin, with the fur inward: about her waist she wore a hunlandic girdle, at which hung a bag, containing her magical instruments; and she supported her feeble limbs by leaning on a staff, adorned with many knobs of brass. As soon as she entered the hall, the whole company arose, as became them, and saluted her in the most respectful manner, which she returned as she thought proper. Earl Thorchill then advanced, and taking her by the hand, conducted her to the seat prepared for her. After some time spent in conversation, a table was set before her, covered with many dishes, but she eat only of a pottage of goat's milk, and of a dish which consisted of the hearts of various animals. When the table was removed, Earl Thorchill humbly approached the prophetess, and asked her what she thought of his house, and of his family, and when she would be pleased to tell them what they desired to know. To this she replied, that she would tell them nothing that evening but would satisfy them fully next day. Accordingly on the day after, when she had put all her implements of divination in proper order; she demanded a maiden, named Godreda, to sing the magical song called Vardlokur, which she did with so clear and sweet a voice, that the whole company were ravished at her music, and none so much as the prophetess herself, who cried out, "Now I know many things concerning the famine and sickness, which I did not know before. This famine will be of short continuance, and plenty will return with the next season, and the sickness also will shortly fly away. As for you my lovely maid Godreda, you shall be married to a nobleman of the highest rank, and become the happy mother of a numerous and flourishing family." Heida, another Danish witch, was constantly attended by thirty men servants, and waited upon by fifteen young maidens, and on all occasions was paid the respect of a queen.

That frown'd new terrors, looking up, he saw
 A Raven—with no Raven's eye! and mark'd
 Unsightly shrubs and tapering roots hang down,
 Wolfsbane and Deadly-night-shade, thick o'erspread
 With living things, abhorrent, by whose aid, 311
 Or heart, or liver, fibre, or thin scale,
 The infernal powers prepared their spells, and made
 Chains for unconscious mortals. Whilst his breath
 Labour'd with fear, the guiding Hag exclaim'd,— 315
 “Now must I leave thee! Yonder view the spot
 “Where our great Mother lies.” The Prince turn'd round
 To claim her further service, but her form,
 Unknowing how, had vanished, and he stood,
 Trembling amid the horrid solitude. 320

Round him he gazed, expectant of all harm,
 Then, sudden, look'd aghast! A Coffin, black,
 Slow rising from the yawning sepulchre,
 His sight arrested, As he earnest view'd,
 He saw the Sorceress! In her narrow bed 325
 Senseless she lay, oppress'd with death-like sleep!
 A pall she had, the snows of ages! Her
 The Prince approach'd; and when he mark'd her face,
 Her still and livid visage, and her eye
 That through the thin thin eye-lid half appear'd, 330
 Back he recoil'd, in terror, but again
 Drew nigh her coffin, and in tremulous tones
 Chanted the runic song.¹⁷

¹⁷ It was Odin who introduced the runic characters, or the art of writing into the North;

Slowly the Witch

Her form uprais'd, stiff with the cavern's damp, 335
 Half red, half blue,¹⁸ whilst venom'd drops distill'd
 Upon her bare head, from the craggy roof,
 Where fearful beings hung, till then unmark'd,—
 Scorpion and Basilisk. When thus she spake,
 "I hear the call! What mortal dares disturb 340
 "This silent mansion?" Stern she cast her eye—
 Her black and shining eye on IVAR near,
 And cried, "Who art thou?"

and in order to obtain greater respect he ascribed to them, miraculous powers, professing by their aid to have the ascendancy over all nature. In his chapter on the runic rhymes, he says, "I know a song by which I enchant the arms of my enemies, and render their weapons of none effect. I know a song of such virtue, that were I caught in a storm, I could hush the winds, and render the air perfectly calm. When I see (he says) magicians travelling through the air, I disconcert them by a single look, and force them to abandon their enterprize. If I see a man dead and hanging aloft on a tree, I engrave runic characters so wonderful, that the man immediately descends and converses with me." When Odin visited hell (as mentioned in an after Note) he compelled the prophetess to speak, for it is said, "he sings to her verses adapted to call up the dead. He looks toward the North; he engraves runic characters on her tomb; he utters mysterious words; he demands an answer; until the prophetess is constrained to arise." Odin was distinguished by the name of the FATHER OF MAGIC. Different runic characters were calculated for different purposes. There were some which could ensure victory, others that averted poison, some that cured bodily diseases, some that dispelled evil thoughts, others that dissipated melancholy, or softened the heart of a cruel mistress. These last were to be used with great caution, for if an ignorant person made but the slightest error, some sore distemper to his mistress was the inevitable consequence, which could only be cured by writing other RUNES with more caution. "Yet after all, these various kinds, differed only in the ceremonies used in writing them, in the materials on which they were written, in the place where they were exposed, and in the manner in which the lines were drawn, whether in the form of a circle, of a serpent, or a triangle." The runic characters which are still preserved, consist chiefly of inscriptions scattered on the rocks of Scandinavia, recording the warlike achievements of kings and heroes. Their letters sent to distant persons, were cut with a knife on the bark of a tree, or on a piece of polished wood. Some cabinets still possess specimens of their epistolary writing, one of which is a love-letter, containing the following words: "I should love better, young maid to repose on thy bosom, than to possess the riches of the world."

¹⁸ The body of Hela is represented as one half blue, the other half of the colour of human flesh.

Shuddering, thus the Prince.

- " Searcher of Fate, to whom all times are known, 345
" Regard thy servant ! Hither I am come
" To ask thy counsel. Say, oh Prophetess !
" Where is my murdered father, he who hoped
" To die in battle, fighting to obtain
" The meed of valor ; but, in evil hour, 350
" Seiz'd, and in dungeon slain ?"

Around she roll'd

- Her troubled eyes, then spake, in solemn tone,
" Mourn not for him, thy father, he is safe.
" I know thee well. Thy father brave I led 355
" To ODIN'S Halls, and never such a shout
" Heard I at warrior's entrance. He is there
" On sparkling thrones of gold; and from the skulls
" Of vanquish'd enemies¹⁹ he quaffs his mead,
" And feasts with the Immortals. Now depart, 360
" And leave me to forgetfulness!" He cried,
" Sorceress, first hear me! To the distant war,
" I forth am going; many a gallant Dane
" With me hath vow'd to cross the ocean-waves,

¹⁹ The pleasures which the Danes expected after death, discover what they most approved during life. The heroes it is said, who are received into the palace of Odin, have every day the pleasure of amusing themselves, of passing in review, of ranging themselves in order of battle, and of cutting one another in pieces : but as soon as the time of repast approaches, they return on horseback all safe and sound to the halls of Odin, and begin eating and drinking. Though the number of them cannot be counted, the flesh of the boar Scrimner is enough for them all. Every day it is served up at table, and every day it is renewed again entire : their beverage is beer and mead ; one single goat, whose milk is excellent mead, furnishes enough of that liquor to intoxicate all the heroes ; and their cups are the skulls of the enemies they have slain.

" And drench his sword in blood, and glut his rage 365

" With spoil and carnage. May I thither go,

" And what the issue?"

" To the Saxon shore,"

She spake, " I know that thou art hast'ning, but,

" Regard the Destinies! If there thou go,— 370

" Denmark no more shall see thee! Now depart,

" And leave me to forgetfulness!" " Oh stay!"

Exclaim'd the Prince. " One only question more;

" And I will leave thee. Canst thou not bestow

" Some charm, some secret charm of powerful might,

" That shall protect my fortunes? girdle, cap,²⁰

" Or minister to guard me?"

" None, she cried.

" No minister can guard thee! I had once

" An earthly servant who was wont to stalk

" Upon the neighbouring shore when howl'd the wind,

" And dash'd the waves, and huge Hresvelger flapp'd²¹

" His wing, and woke the tempest. That brave man

²⁰ Witches, or as they were often called, Fatal Sisters, or Nymphs, were supposed to possess the power of granting to whom they thought proper, Caps, that which ever way they were turned, should direct the weather, (See latter part of Note 13) Girdles of defence, Swords of might, and Armours of proof. It was one of the latter which Hothen King of Sweden received, when he made a successful war upon Balder, who was a descendant of the God Balder. King Gover had the power granted him, of seeing from Norway whatever was attempted against him in Sweden, though at the distance of a hundred German miles. Witches, also, commonly promised the warriors who applied to them for aid, an invisible attendant who should succour them in all seasons of danger; this they might do with much safety, for if slain, they could not upbraid, and if victorious, they only returned to heap new presents and praises.

²¹ The Danes supposed the wind to arise from the flapping of the wings of a huge Eagle, named Hresvelger. The Greenlanders to this day attribute thunder to two women in the clouds who are stretching and flapping dried seal-skins.

" Might readily have served thee. His it was
 " To watch the storm, and when the furious surge 385
 " Cast on the shore some shipwreck'd Mariner
 " All stiff and cold, he hither brought his corse
 " To feed yon beings,—pendent from the roof."
 When each of the abhorrent forms, his mouth
 Wide open spread. The Sorceress thus again, 390
 " Son of the upper world, look not amazed
 " At these my words:—yon starving family
 " Must have some flesh and blood! He is no more
 " Who would have served them. A portentous noise,
 " Thrice echoed, lately rush'd across the dome,— 395
 " It was his spirit! Some hell-haunted man
 " Had murder'd him! His services are o'er!
 " Did I say o'er? Turn to the North!"²²

Her word

The Prince obey'd; when, on a crag, he spied 400
 Two twinkling fires. They toward him came! His heart
 Shrunk with dismay; for slow, a reptile form,
 Gliding, drew near. As IVAR earnest look'd,
 Beneath his sight it grew, large, and more large!
 And now appear'd a hideous monster, huge, 405
 Of Serpent kind, with human countenance!
 And at the Prince he fix'd his steady gaze.
 Then IVAR on his neck beheld a gash—
 A broad, and well-known gash—he started back!
 And, wistless what he did, approach'd the Hag 410

²² At the time the runic characters were writing, as well as during many other ceremonies, it was deemed necessary to look toward the north.

And her stone tenement, still holding out
 His trembling hands. He touch'd the Witch's arm!
 'Twas ice, all ice, when, sideways, leaping far,
 His eye-strings snapp'd, and on the hideous sight,
 On either side his twisted eye-balls glared. 415
 Loud, from the roof, the Raven, flapp'd his wing!
 His claws, the Scorpion shook! the Serpent hiss'd!
 While, from the earth beneath, came a deep groan!

O'erpower'd by agony of fear, the Prince
 Awhile stood motionless; when, 'mid the pause, 420
 He heard a rushing noise, like of some waves
 Rending the ground below; downward he look'd,
 And, on each side, beheld a ravine, deep,
 O'er which his foot half hung, and in the gulf
 Conflicting torrents, like as when some Whale 425
 Or ocean monster lashes the great deep.
 "Ye raging waves, be still! Ye ravines, close!"
 Turning, the Sorceress cried, and all was whole.
 When thus again she spake. "Young Prince, attend!
 "To distant wars thou goest; think of me! 430
 "For, if from Denmark's shore thou pass, believe!
 "Thou never shalt return! Upon yon rock,
 "High over-head, I see thy name combined
 "With Death and Saxons."

Faltering cried the Prince,
 "Check not my thirst of glory! say not nay!
 "My heart upon revenge hath fed so long,
 "And I have nursed with such full ecstasy

“ The hope of vengeance, that, though death reward,
“ I must subdue the Saxons, and with blood 440
“ Wipe out my many wrongs! My gallant sire
“ They murder’d; I am REGNER’S Son, this sword
“ He call’d his own, and, if I use it not
“ How shall I meet my father? Think again!
“ And, if for death there be one antidote, 445
“ Deal it I pray!”

The Witch replied. “ Thy mind
“ Knows not to change its purpose; like Heaven’s bow,
“ Once, and for ever bent : but, if thou yet
“ Resolve with stubborn heart to cross the seas, 450
“ Here, take these threads. Thy sisters, three, require
“ To weave them in a Standard, and display—
“ Yon Raven! power shall it possess to screen
“ From hidden dangers, and, no human force
“ Against thee shall prevail, while thou possess 455
“ This potent safeguard. Now, no more inquire,
“ Or I my wand will raise, and, from the ground
“ Call up unnumber’d ghosts, monstrous and fierce,
“ And terrible to look on; these shall drag
“ Thy soul to hela.²³ 460

²³ It is said, three monsters owe their birth to Odin—The wolf Fenris, the serpent of Midgard and Hela or Death. These are enemies to the Gods, who after various struggles have been bound by them, till the last day, when the wolf Fenris, will break loose and devour the Sun. The serpent has been cast into the Sea, where he will remain till he is conquered by the God Thor. Hela or Death has been banished to the lower regions, where she has the government of nine Worlds, into which she distributes those who are sent to her. When Hell is spoken of, the lower Worlds are referred to, under the government of Hela.

“ Seest thou yonder snake,
“ Whose sight thou started'st at, approach? he comes
“ To do my bidding.” To the Witch he crawl'd,
And, heaving from the earth his crested neck,
Bent o'er her coffin: whom she thus address'd. 465
“ Spirit and Brother, hear! a mortal man
“ Now stands before me; to the fight he hastes,
“ Far o'er the seas, and many a wrathful deed
“ His hands will perpetrate. He forth must pass
“ Through these mysterious vaults: be thou his guide!

“ From this abode, three paths conduct to earth,
“ One, to the right, a plain and smooth ascent,
“ Where the wild chaplet crowns the barren rock,
“ And odours wander. One, the second way,
“ O'er crags it is, all black, and aged moss 475
“ Coeval with the world, in which there hide
“ Contending reptiles infinite, whose eyes
“ Like thine are bright. The third approach to earth
“ Is through a lane, narrow, at whose dark mouth
“ Two furious Toads, opposing, stand and spit 480
“ Their deadly venom, ever scattering round
“ A slime, from which steams up the pestilence
“ That gives them life and spirits to renew
“ The rancorous warfare. Wide the passage spreads,
“ And terminates in gates, the which to touch 485
“ With this thy sting will burst, and then appears,—
“ The course this man should take. The gates expand
“ Midway the pit, and o'er each step there hang

" Black jutting rocks, trembling with every breath,
" Held by the tangled ivy. To the eye 490
" A light appears, a red uncertain light,
" But whence it comes is hidden, for no lamp
" Nor fire is there; while nothing can be grasp'd
" To aid the ascent most perilous, but what
" Thou dealest. Upward is the road to earth, 495
" But, in the way, if once the traveller
" Should cast a sudden glance down the deep void,
" A sight there is—two Dragons climbing fast
" The dark abyss, with fangs of living fire,
" And eyes that feed the lightning. If thine aid 500
" One moment should withdraw, hope ceases, down
" The victim falls, the dragons following,
" But never to o'ertake, till to the shades
" He plunges, where the tortured spirits howl."
Again she spake. " These paths thou knowest well;
" Thou art unbodied, and no power they have
" To hurt or hinder thee. Receive thy charge!
" Conduct him hence, through either avenue,
" At thy disposal. Swift!" the Sorceress cried,
And sank back in her coffin! which, again, 510
Descended slowly!

As he speechless stood,
The cauldron's fires expired! Throughout the vault
No ray appear'd! no solitary ray,
Save where the serpent crouch'd: beneath his scales 515
There shone a glow-worm light, whose feeble beams

Midnight disdain'd to share, and sent them back
Close to their source.

IVAR distracted stood,
Gnashing his teeth. He heard no sound, save one, 520
The clanking of some distant chains, nor saw
Aught but thick darkness: when he feebly cried,
"Almighty Gods, grant me one ray of light!"
His voice yet linger'd in the air, when lo!
A deafening noise surrounded, and there rush'd 525
Athwart the night profound, lightnings so fierce,
All forked, casting far so bright a glare,
That by their aid he saw, till then unknown,
The cave's extent. His curdling blood stood still!
He laugh'd with fear! for on one side he saw 530
A raving demon, chain'd, of monstrous size,
Biting his fetters, foaming, mad with rage,
To see his prey, yet, by his iron bands
Restrain'd from vengeance. As the Prince beheld,
And shiver'd, toward his face a flash approach'd, 535
Sudden, but, ere it reach'd him, burst and spread
Its vivid lines; whilst, ever as he look'd,
A fiercer flash, resentful, darted near,
And when he thought on death, exploded, loud,
Sending its host of thunders through the cave. 540

Wild with excess of dread he closed his eyes
To 'scape the hideous sight. Whilst trembling, thus
In utter darkness, something at his back
Pull'd heavily, when loud the Prince exclaim'd,

" A thousand worlds to save me ! guide me hence,
 " Oh injured being ! guide me from this scene
 " Of horrors infinite, and I to thee
 " Will give my earthly all !"

Then spake the Serpent—

" There was a time when baubles such as thine 550
 " Would well have pleased me; but, a ghost become,
 " I heed them not. Within my power thou art,
 " And thou shalt know how terrible my wrath.
 " I now must leave this dwelling; close attend
 " My track, for if thou wander but a hair, 555
 " Hell yawns to have thee."

Slow the Serpent moved,

And as he moved, a shining slimy track
 Mark'd his curv'd path. Ivar upon it walk'd
 Through windings many, fearing at each step 560
 The irremed'able fall. And now they came
 Where the three turnings stood. The shuddering Prince
 Beheld one filled with fire, changeful and dim,
 And heard the Dragon rave: he turn'd, aghast,
 And in the other path—the path he came, 565
 Saw darkness, save where creeping reptile's eyes
 Glared on him. Then he look'd, and, to the right,
 Descry'd the third ascent: no fire was there—
 No angry reptile, but half light it was,
 The steps distinct and clear, the distance short, 570
 And at the top, shone the blue firmament.
 The serpent cried—" Now, follow me !"

What joy

Rush'd through the Prince's bosom when he saw
 His guide wind slowly up the blessed way 575
 That shone so bright and lovely; and they came
 Into Heaven's day-light! IVAR quick turn'd round
 To thank his guide, when, stared him in the face,
 His ghastly neck-wound. In his heart he felt
 Biting remorse, which made him clench his eyes 580
 With inbred pangs: and when again he turn'd
 To speak his gratitude—no guide appear'd!
 No mouth of yawning cavern—both were gone!²⁴

²⁴ As this book is chiefly founded upon the principle of ILLUSIONS, the following is an account of some of those which it was believed the God Thor experienced on his journey to the city of UTGARD, to try his strength with the giants to whom it belonged.

On a certain day THOR set out with LOKE in his own chariot, drawn by two he-goats: overtaking a giant of the name of Skrymner, they joined company and night coming on, they lay down to rest. Thor having taken offence at the giant in the former part of the day, approached, when he thought him asleep, and hurled his mace at his head. Skrymner, awaking, inquired if a leaf had not fallen upon him, and slept again: Thor approaching him a second time, drove his mace through the hinder part of his head; the giant awaking asked if a grain of dust had not fallen upon him, and went to sleep a third time. Thor enraged, then hurled his mace with greater violence, and almost buried it in his cheek. Skrymner awaked and asked if there were any birds there, for he thought a feather had fallen upon him: the Giant now arising said to Thor and his companions, I heard you whisper that I was a very tall man, but you are going where they are much taller, and who will resent any offence which may be offered by such little men as yourselves, which having said, he entered a forest, whilst Thor and Loke proceeded towards Utgard, the City of the Giants. They now entered the gates, and addressed themselves to the King, who discovering who they were, pretended to laugh heartily at their diminutive appearance, and asked them what art they excelled in, saying, that none were permitted to dwell there who were not distinguished for some one excellence above all others: upon which Loke replied, that he could eat more than any man. Let us see that, said the king, and ordered one of his courtiers, whose name was Logè, to come forward and contend with him. Upon which, a large trough full of victuals was produced, and each beginning at one end, they met in the middle; but the victory was adjudged to Logè, because he had eaten the bones as well as the flesh, whereas, Loke had only eaten the flesh. The king then asked what the young man could do who accompanied Thor. THEALFE (for that was his name) answered that he could skate better than any man: Let us determine that, said the king, and conducting him to a snowy plain, gave him Hugo as a competitor: But Hugo so outstripped Thealfe, that he arrived at his journey's end almost the moment he set

Fragments of lofty rocks encircled him.
 It was one waste of stone, all wild and bare, 585
 That, through succeeding ages, crumbling fast,
 By rains and winter frosts, from the tall peaks
 Came roaring down the precipice, and spread
 O'er all the valley, crags and shatter'd spars,
 High-heap'd, and massy—such as man might deem 590
 A world in ruins.

Looking round, he saw
 The ocean near him, casting on the shore

off. The king then inquired of Thor in what he chose to give proof of his dexterity. Thor replied, that he would contest the prize of drinking with any person at his court: the king consented, and a horn was brought, filled to the brim, which the king said was often by those around him emptied at one draft, most commonly at two, but that none required more than three. Thor was astonished at its magnitude, yet being thirsty, he was determined to do his best, but upon looking into the horn, he could hardly perceive any diminution, when putting it to his mouth a second time, he was resolved to empty it, but on examination scarce any was missed; with this he made a third attempt, determining to retrieve his credit, but still found the horn almost full, upon which Thor relinquished the contest. I see, said the king you are not quite so stout a man as I thought you. We have, said the king, a trifling exercise in this City, which consists in lifting my Cat from the ground; upon which, a large iron-coloured Cat leaped into the middle of the hall, and Thor putting his hand under the Cat's belly, attempted to raise him with all his might, but could only lift one of his feet from the ground. This said the king is just what I expected, Thor is little compared with the men of Utgard. Little as I am, said Thor, let me see who will wrestle with me. The king, looking round, said, there is no one here who would not think it beneath him to enter the lists with you; call hither my old nurse Hela. Immediately a toothless old woman appeared, and after many desperate struggles, Thor was brought on one knee; upon which the king ordered them to desist, and turning to Thor, said, there is now no one in my court whom I could ask with honor to fight with you.

The king then conducted Thor and his companions out of the city, upon which Thor remarked that he went away very much ashamed and disappointed. It behoves me then, said the king, to discover to you the truth, since you are out of my city, and I will take care you shall never return to it again while I live and reign: and I assure you had I known half your strength, you should not have entered it now; but I enchanted you by my ILLUSIONS. First of all, in the forest where I arrived before you, you aimed three blows at me with your mace; the first stroke though slight would have brought me to the ground had I received it, but when you arrive at the place again, you will behold a rock, in which are three narrow chan-

Its sweeping lines of foam, advancing slow
 With murmurs faint, and of such equal sounds, 595
 That silence scarce perceiv'd them. To the beach
 He hasten'd, and o'erjoy'd beheld a ship
 Fast sailing near at hand. He cried, "Approach!"
 The Prince was known—he bounded to the bark,
 And safe it bore him to his distant home. 600

No tongue might tell the doubts and cankering fears
 That on the sisters prey'd, when morn drew nigh,
 And yet the Prince reach'd not his father's halls.
 No sleep o'ertook them, and in every sound
 They heard his voice or footstep, and arose 605

nels, one in particular remarkably deep; these are the breaches made by your mace, for I at that time lay concealed behind the rock which you did not perceive. I have used the same illusions, in the contests you have had with the people of my court: Your companion, Loke, like hunger itself, devoured all that was set before him: but his opponent Logè was nothing else but a wandering fire, which instantly consumed not only the meat, but the bones and the very trough itself. Hugo with whom Thealfe disputed the prize for swiftness, was no other than THOUGHT or SPIRIT. When you attempted to empty the horn, you performed upon my word a deed so marvellous, that I should never have believed it if I had not seen it myself: for one end of the horn reashed to the sea, a circumstance you did know: but the first time you go to the sea, you will perceive how much it is shrunk. You performed no less a miracle in lifting the cat, and to tell you the truth, when we saw you lift one of her paws from the earth, we were all extremely surprised and terrified; for what you took to be a cat, was no other than the great serpent of Midgard, which encompasses the earth; and he was then scarce long enough to touch the earth with his head and his tail, so high, had you raised him toward heaven. As to your wrestling with an old woman, it was very astonishing that she should have been able to bring you down on one knee only, for it was DEATH with whom you wrestled, who first or last, will bring every one low. But now as we are going to part, let me tell you, it will be equally for your advantage as well as mine, that you never come near me again; for should you do so, I shall again defend myself by other illusions and enchantments, so that you will never be able to prevail against me. As he uttered these words, Thor in a rage, laid hold of his mace, and would have launched it at the king, but he suddenly disappeared, and when the God would have returned to the city to destroy it, he saw nothing all around him but vast plains, covered with verdure. Continuing therefore his course, Thor with his companions, arrived at his Palace among the Gods.

With heart exultant, then again return'd,
Languid and soul oppress'd, to listen on
Till noon-tide mark'd the air. No IVAR then
Drew near to cheer them. Toward the sounding shore
They silent gaz'd, nor gazed they long in vain,
They saw their brother! From the beach, at hand,
Solemn he paced, and now before them stood.

No word he spake: a dark and settled gloom
Hung o'er his brow. "What ails thee?" one exclaim'd.
"I have seen sights," he said, "so horrible; 615
"Such sights of shadowy forms, and things unknown,
"And past conception, that my swimming eyes
"Seem chain'd to serpents; through my yielding brain
"They to and fro glide on—all fire and slime,
"And ghastly scales. Are ye my sisters, true? 620
"My real sisters? Yes! I know you now.
"The hell-hag, where is she? I see her not!
"Ah, is she gone?"

"What, brother aileth thee,
"That thou shouldst thus afflict thy soul, and ours?"
His sisters cried. "What vision hast thou seen?"

"'Tis past" the Prince exclaim'd "it is all o'er,
"My brain is cool'd. It was a sudden fit
"That half o'erpower'd me. What! do you inquire
"The sight that moved me? 'twas a hellish sight!
"My feet have been to one 'mid rocks and fires,

" Down to earth's centre :²⁵ haggard was her look,
 " Her bed a coffin, and her progeny
 " Huge broods of serpents: from her icy touch
 " I still am cold! A ghost conveyed me there! 635
 " I made him such! A ghost defended me!
 " Now, here I swear by my unconquer'd sword,²⁶
 " Never, from this good moment, in the isle
 " Whereto I go, one soul to slay, but him
 " Who dares the battle, and, in armour bold 640
 " Opposes my dominion: I have borne
 " For one poor murder such big punishments
 " And freezing dread—"

²⁵ The persons who were consulted concerning future events, were chiefly women, who often resided in caves and lonely places, surrounded by every thing which was most calculated to impress the minds of the beholders. On extraordinary occasions visits were even made to Hell. Odin on hearing the portentous dream of Balder, repaired thither to consult the Witch Volva for his safety, and after Balder's death Hermod the son of Odin was sent to Hell in order to persuade Hela to release him. For the space of nine days and as many nights he travelled through deep valleys, so dark that he saw not where he was going, till he arrived at the River Gioll, which having passed, he entered the abodes of Death, and beheld his brother. It was believed also that Hadrin king of Denmark had been conveyed by the influence of Magic, far under the earth, where were displayed to him the monsters of the infernal regions. It is a visit in some respects similar to these which is made the subject of the present Book. I have also availed myself of the *illusions* so generally credited by the Danes and other northern Nations, in which, by the power of necromancy, forms and spectacles were presented to the eye, producing in the beholder the effect of reality; and it is almost impossible for the imagination to conceive any scenes too wild to find illustration among the actions recorded of the Scandinavian Necromancers, Heroes and Gods.

²⁶ From the earliest antiquity, the Danes paid divine honors to their swords, their battle-axes and their pikes. It was by planting a spear, that they determined the precise spot where prayers and sacrifices should be offered; and after Temples were erected, they still retained so much respect for the sword, that they never made a statue of Odin without placing one in his hand. On the eve of an engagement, they always swore by "the shoulder of a horse, or the edge of a sword." Necromancers professed the power of charming swords, which prevented an enemy from doing any execution with them. The antidote against charms was, keeping the sword wrapt in cloathes, which every Warrior was careful to do except at the moment of engagement. It was by preserving his sword in this manner, that Haldan, a Champion of Norway, resisted the power of Magic, and was at length enabled to kill Heldiger the giant.

THORILDA, earnest, cried,

“What spake the Hag?” IVAR replied—“she said,
 “I know thy sisters; three there are; their spells
 “Must aid thee. Tell them to prepare a flag,
 “Wrought with these magic threads; a banner tall.
 “That shall display a Raven; guard it safe!
 “It has a secret charm.” “The cords I held 650
 “Close in my grasp, but they are gone! all gone,
 “I know not whither. Haste! a standard weave;
 “The Raven dark be on it; let the web
 “Be strong and durable, and I will bear
 “That standard to the wars.” 655

He scarce had said,

When the three sisters spread the woof and warp,
 And whilst they thought upon it, lo! 'twas done.²⁷
 “Now,” cried the exultant Prince, “I hear a voice
 “That tells me I shall vanquish; this strange deed,
 “Miraculous, endues my leaping heart
 “With powers unknown, and arms my sword with might
 “Invincible.” He grasp'd the ensign, near,

²⁷ It is historically true, that the Danes invaded Britain, bearing a standard, called the Reafan or Raven, which was believed to be a magical standard, and to have been made *instantaneously* by the three sisters of Ivar and Hubba, prior to their brothers' departure from Denmark. The Raven was the usual figure displayed on the Danish standards (though not always, like the present, the production of Magic) and which is supposed to have arisen from this circumstance. Odin in order to obtain greater respect from his followers, it is said, had two Ravens, so cunningly taught, that they would fly abroad, and at their return, always perch upon his shoulders, putting their beaks to his ear as though whispering to him. These, he pretended, brought him information of whatever was taking place in the most distant parts of the world.

And, like another Starchaterus, huge,²⁸
 In pride pre-eminent, stalk'd toward the shore, 665
 Where, in their war array, his army stood,
 Impatient, waiting to behold their chief,
 Who thus address'd them.

“ Heroes! far renown'd
 “ O'er all Helsingia, Gothland, and the Coasts, 670
 “ And far as farthest Russia,—hear my words!
 “ For other conquests, and, more glorious,

²⁸ Starchaterus was the most famous of the northern Giants; his history exhibits the manners of the age in which he lived, as well as those actions, which so exalted the character of other Giants—such as Harthin, Ritho, Arngrin, Arverod, Horldam, Shatur, Heall and Olo. Some women also were remarkable for encountering Giants, in single combat with great success, of whom the most famous were, Visna, Hetha, and Vegtbiorg. These even commanded armies and were the most celebrated warriors of their time. Starchaterus lived to a great age, not more distinguished for his virtues than he was for his success as a general, and his valour in single combat. For centuries after his death, monuments were to be found in the North, commemorating his exploits. According to the custom of the age, he lived in, he commenced a Pirate, and having subdued many provinces, at length arrived in Russia, killed Floccus its king, and spoiled him of his treasures, when he assisted by turns, the Biarmians, the Swedes and the Danes. After this he visited Ireland, and killed two of its most famous Champions, when hearing of Visinnus a noted warrior in the eastern parts of Russia, he went thither, and slew him. This Visinnus by his cruelty and vices had rendered himself abhorred by all; and the reputation of the virtuous Starchaterus, was yet more extended through the North, in consequence of having subdued him. He then visited Poland, and slew in single combat the Giants Hama and Vasche. Being requested by Helgon king of Norway, to contend with nine Champions who, at an appointed time, had threatened to deprive him of Helga his wife, Starchaterus arrived before them, and throwing off his clothes, regardless of the wind and the snow, set forward to meet them, and though not unwounded, killed, in succession, each of his adversaries. Starchaterus distinguished himself greatly in that famous battle between Rengo king of Sweden and Harold king of Denmark, in which the Swedes were victorious, leaving on the field of battle, twelve thousand gallant men, while of the Danes were killed thirty thousand. Finding at length old age approach, and fearing least he should be deprived of his former honors by dying a natural death, he hung 120 pounds weight of gold about his neck (what he had obtained for conquering the tyrant Olo) which he promised to bestow on whoever would kill him: at length meeting with Hather, a young Nobleman, whose father he had slain, Starchaterus held his neck toward the ground and prevailed on him with a sharp sword to cut it off.

- " Prepare your veteran hearts. From Britain's soil
" I late return'd to Denmark, you to rouse,
" And bear to that devoted Isle, whose crimes 675
" No offering shall atone, nor aught allay
" The tempest of our passion. Have we yet
" Borne wrongs from any nation, unrevenged?
" And shall we Saxons spare, whose coward hands
" Slaughter'd my father, your victorious Prince? 680
" Till earth be vanish'd, never, never, Danes!
" Their doom is fix'd! ALFRED, their king shall fall
" The victim of our wrath, and we will make
" That Isle a desart—curs'd of gods and men:
" The day fast hastens to begin the work 685
" By us so loved, and we will laugh to see
" Their mangled limbs—their writhing carcasses—
" Their pleading looks; and when they ask for mercy,
" Think of the murder'd REGNER. View the fleet!
" Advance! the hour of vengeance draweth near." 690

'Mid frantic looks of hate, and boiling rage,
Untameable, they join their Barks, and soon,
With songs and shouts, before the favoring gale,
Across the seas to Britain steer their course.

ALFRED. BOOK II.

SCENE, SOMERSETSHIRE.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED, in the depth of his misfortunes, announces to his troops his determination of going into solitude. Oddune dismissed to encourage the West-Saxons. His character. Introduction of Sigbert, Abbot of Wilton, who escaped with difficulty when that Abbey was destroyed by the Danes. With intellects disturbed by the injuries he had experienced, he declares his determination of becoming a warrior. Alfred appoints Selwood-Forest as the rendezvous of his troops. Dismisses them. He departs, with Alswitba his Queen, and their infant Son, toward a neighbouring beach. Time, the Evening. Season of the Year, Midsummer.

IN a deep glen, surrounded by tall rocks,
And hanging trees, whose foliage dark half hid
The light of day, while with soft melody
A mountain stream beside him murmuring ran,
Stood ALFRED, poring on his country's wrongs. 5
Such cares were his as drink the spirit up !
No word he utter'd, whilst his troops around,
Weary and heartless, stedfastly beheld
Their Monarch's face, with such a general look,
As when the wind sweeps o'er some grove, whose leaves
Turn to the obtruding breeze, and seem to ask,
What power had moved them. Gazing slowly round,
Thus spake the King :

“ Subjects and faithful Friends !

“ Behold your Sovereign, stripped and desolate ! 15

“ Unfriended, save by you : and this weak babe—

" This wretched mother,¹ partners in his grief,
" And none to aid."

A thousand clashing shields,
Sounding through all the air, his words attend ; 20
A thousand voices shake Heaven's concave wide—
" These swords shall aid thee—Death or Victory !"

Replied the Monarch—" Strength is no avail,
" Nor spirit dauntless ; these devouring Danes,
" Like locusts spread around;² like locusts, know 25
" No preference, but all that lives and moves,
" Old men and mothers, youths and orphan babes,
" All fall before them ; all, together lie,
" Mangled and stretched upon the earth, whose bones
" No grave shall hide. Subjects ! I love you well ; 30
" And 'tis that love, which makes me feel the more
" At this sad time. Thousands, whom once we knew,
" Where are they ? Those, who, like yourselves, once felt
" Their hearts throb fast with courage, saw their homes
" Burnt and destroyed, their children heaped in death ;

¹ It is historically true that Alfred at this time was married to a Mercian lady, whose name was Alswitha, and that Edward his eldest son was now born. I suppose both to be present.

² The Danes who had formerly appeared in England, were few in comparison of those that now contended with Alfred. We are told that they filled every corner of the land. That after divers dispersings, they concentrated themselves into one large body " and being besides so much increased with new incomers, as that they were now a mighty army, conducted by Ivar and Hubba, like locusts covering the face of the earth. They now despised any longer to be resisted by so poor a number as the West-Saxons were grown unto, and therefore contrary to faith and oath, and the security of their hostages, they enter the king's proper states, and like a raging flood bear all before them, taking Chippenham in Wiltshire, at that time a principal Town of the kings of the West-Saxons, and furthermore continuing their inroads."

" Their lawful Prince, a wanderer through the wilds,
 " And woods, and mountains ! they, like you, disdained
 " Inglorious ease at such an hour, and rose,
 " Fierce in their wrath, to meet the enemy ;
 " But, they are gone, where all who hear must go, 40
 " If with vain hope, longer we dare the strife.
 " Hard thoughts, and many, press upon my mind ;
 " I would declare them, but, a secret weight
 " Keeps my tongue silent ; yet, they shall be told,
 " Tho' painful. — We must part." 45

A sudden pause

Seem'd to pervade the air, and every eye,
 Intentful gazed upon him. " We must part !"
 Then sounded from the Brook ; the very trees,
 Attentive, far around, caught the same words, 50
 And in responses, murmured—" We must part !"

Stifling his secret grief, again the King :
 " Befits us, friends, and subjects, to survey
 " Our real state. Here, under this vast arch,
 " We stand ; no house to shelter us, our homes 55
 " Made desolate, our bravest men laid low !
 " What prospect have we ? Not like other foes,
 " Come these fierce Danes,³ to grasp ideal good,

³ Except about forty years before, and in a small number, the Danes first appeared on the coast of England in the reign of Edgar, in detached parties, and with no other than piratical views. On their first arrival, Edgar was on a successful expedition to Wales, being on the point of adding that kingdom to his other dominions, but hearing of his new enemies, he hastened to meet them. The following year the Danes arrived in greater force, and had committed much devastation before they were repelled. Two years after, they came with a still

“ Wealth, fame, or honors: not like other foes,
“ Disheartened at the sight of blood, stand these,
“ And see their Friends cut off; the very grin
“ Of Death, in all its horrors, brings to them
“ Marks of ecstatic joy, and leaves no hope

superior army, and having prevailed on the Britons of Cornwall to revolt and join them, they proceeded to encounter the West-Saxon king. Egbert not dismayed at this junction, engaged and defeated the combined army at Hengsdown-hill, with prodigious slaughter. This was the last glorious action of the life of that great prince, and first of English monarchs, who died A. D. 836. In the reign of Ethelwolf, the visits of the Danes became annual, or even more frequent, and the histories of those times consist of little more than details of the ravages of the Danes, and of their contests with the inhabitants. The most considerable battle was fought at Okely in Surry, 851, between Ethelwolf assisted by his son Ethelbald, and a great army of Danes, who had landed from a fleet of 350 sail, at the mouth of the river Thames, and had taken and plundered the cities of Canterbury and London in their march. In this action, which is said to have been the bloodiest that was ever fought in England, the English obtained a great victory; but notwithstanding this and two other victories, which they gained in the same year, one by land at Wanbury in Dorsetshire, and another by sea, near Sandwich; the Danes took possession of the Isle of Thanet, where they continued several years, being their first attempt to gain a settlement in England. During the reigns of Ethelbald, Ethelbert, and Ethered, the three eldest sons of Ethelwolf, the Danes, no longer contented with making desultory descents upon the coast, came over in greater multitudes, under more honorable leaders and penetrated farther into the Country. The Danes had now taken possession, and fortified Reading, making it their head-quarters, when Ethered marched at the head of his subjects to dislodge them, and in the course of one year (871) engaged the Danes in five pitched battles with various success. He was mortally wounded in the last of these battles. This virtuous but unhappy prince, left the kingdom to ALFRED, his younger brother, and fourth son of Ethelwolf.

ALFRED, who is justly called the great, and who has ever been esteemed the pride and glory of the English nation, began his reign under the greatest disadvantages. Many of his cities, towns, and villages were reduced to ashes, his best provinces almost depopulated, his bravest captains and soldiers slain in battle, and a powerful army of cruel, exulting barbarians, in the very heart of his country. Yet, undiscouraged, he did every thing which it was possible for the most consummate wisdom to conceive, or the most intrepid courage to perform. From the superior number however of the enemy, and their continually receiving fresh accessions from Denmark, Alfred, after many desperate struggles (having fought in one year, nine pitched battles) in which he had been forsaken by the Mercians and Northumbrians (see Note 4,) found it no longer possible to oppose the victorious Danes, and judging it wiser to suspend his offensive operations, till more favourable circumstances arose, he ordered his faithful followers to conceal themselves awhile in the vast forest of Selwood (see Note 16) whilst he himself assuming the character of a peasant, retired to a neat-herd's cottage. It is at the time of dismissing his troops, that the scene, in England, opens.

" But, to partake the same triumphant end.
 " This scourge we must endure ! The God of Heaven
 " Hath will'd it, and for mortals, such as we,
 " To be resign'd, is best ; he gave us all,
 " And he, to take away, knows when is right."

His listless eye he cast upon the ground ;
 When each man, who, before, felt bold enough 70
 To talk most long, and eloquent, now stood
 Silent, and knew how weak the power of speech
 To tell the heart's pure feelings.

Alfred thus :

" Most injured men ! you, who have nobly fought 75
 " For life and liberty, whose high-born souls
 " Have scorn'd the invader's yoke, and dared defend
 " Your common rights 'gainst the remorseless brood
 " Denmark sends forth—regard my words.

" Full long 80

" Have I revolved upon your wretchedness,
 " And, true it is, few hopes are left. 'Twere vain
 " To feast you with big words that only serve
 " To lead you to your graves. The Danes are here !
 " The Danes are there ! on every side they stand, 85
 " Pointing the lance. An idle thing, to boast
 " What courage might do, to the men whose arms
 " Strong fetters bind ; and like those men are we,—
 " Few, destitute, left to contend alone.
 " At such a time, my brethren ! who would think, 90

- " Resentments, and low jealousies,⁴ should spread
 " Their baneful mildew? who would dare to think,
 " At such a time, that Saxon should turn back
 " To cast the leer at Saxon, when around
 " The Danes make Desolation clap her hands? 95
 " You cannot hope to conquer and support
 " Your Prince and Country: men like these, who come
 " From some far land, hiding the very face
 " Of our green ocean, need not heed what few
 " These swords may slay,* and in the tardy war 100
 " Our numbers waste, we fall by conquering.
 " 'Till then the Almighty's retributive hand
 " Our foes o'ertake, wisely, we shun the strife,
 " Unequal, with these faithless men,⁵ whom God

4 Alfred at the beginning of his reign, had summoned the Mercians, and the Northumbrians to join him with their whole forces, but these infatuated Nations taking advantage of the king's distresses, and unmindful of the danger to which the whole country was exposed, refused to comply.

* Asserius tells us, that " If thirty thousand of the Danes were killed in one day, there arrived as many again on the next."

5 The Danes, on several occasions, during the reign of Ethered, having experienced the valour of Alfred, who fought in the army of his brother, soon after his accession to the throne, consented to a peace, and agreed to retire out of the West-Saxon territories. In consequence of this agreement, they evacuated Reading, and retired to London, where they spent the winter. Burthred, who then governed Mercia, unable to dislodge these troublesome inmates by force, prevailed upon them by many valuable presents to leave his kingdom, from whence they marched into the country of the East-Angles, and fixed their head-quarters for some time at Torksay. Having destroyed every thing in these parts, they returned (874) into Mercia, of which they made an entire conquest; obliging Burthred to abandon his country in despair, who retired to Rome, where he soon after died. The Danish army then entered the kingdom of Wessex, and penetrated as far as Wareham in Dorsetshire, which they surprised and sacked. Alfred, roused by this invasion from the short repose he had enjoyed since the last peace, with the Danes, and finding himself unprepared to meet them in the field, (this being the largest army that had ever appeared in England, commanded by Ivar and Hubba, the sons of Regner, who was slain by Ella, as mentioned Note 2, First Book,) entered into a second negotiation with them, which ended in a peace. But these faithless barbarians violated the treaty, almost as soon as it was made, by surprising the city of Exeter. Alfred, now con-

" Will surely judge. I must withdraw awhile! 105

" ALFRED in arms will but enflame their wrath

" And stimulate to fiercer deeds of blood.

" Sorrowing I leave you! For your unknown homes

" Go search, and, whether they be found immured

" In some dark forest, or upon the top 110

" Of barren hills, or deep in mountain cave,

" Or 'mid the precipice—safe may you be!

" This heart will draw its choicest sweets from thoughts

" Of your good faith, your patient sufferings;

" And if one hope could cheer me, it would spring

" From the faint recollection that Heaven's eye

" Sees mortals as they are, and, sometimes deals

" To virtues such as yours full and unthought

" Deliverance. Take my blessing—my best praise:

" No longer shall your precious blood be spilt 120

" In useless combat.—Haste, some refuge find!

" And tho' in secret I awhile must dwell,

" Yet, like the spirit of each man, that still

" Followeth in light and darkness, so will I

vinced that nothing could preserve his country from being conquered, but a brave resistance, collected all his forces, and invested Exeter by land, whilst a fleet, which he had prepared and manned, chiefly with Frisian pirates, blocked up the mouth of the river Ex, to prevent them from being succoured by sea; when the Danes capitulated, entering into the most solemn engagements, never more to molest the West-Saxons. They now retired to Mercia, where they wintered. While they remained in Mercia, they received a large reinforcement of their countrymen; which determined them once more to return into the kingdom of Wessex, and having seized Chippenham, they over-ran the whole country. (878) The West-Saxons, who, animated by the example and exhortations of their King, had made so noble a stand in defence of their country, when all the rest of England had submitted, were now, after a succession of severe defeats, obliged to flee before the victorious Danes. (See Notes 2 and 3.)

" Unnoticed, haunt your footsteps, and, again, 125
 " If hope should rise, start forward like the sun,
 " Which shows himself from under some dark cloud
 " That many a dubious day hath warr'd on high."

Silent he stood, and, with heart-weariness
 Chanced to espy the brook, slow murmuring near; 130
 Whilst interruptions from the stones, that strew'd
 Its shallow bed, or the thick-dancing reeds,
 Stay'd not its course, for, still, with earnest speed,
 And undiverted, fast it rolled along,
 Never to know tranquillity, till mix'd 135
 With the great mass of waters. " So must thou"—
 A voice most sweetly whispered—" So must thou,
 " Toil on, O King! nor vainly hope to gain
 " A quiet, till in death, that ocean, lost.

The musing Prince looked up, for, ODDUNE stood⁶
 Before him—" Hear me, King!" the Chief began.

6 Oddune, was Alderman or Earl of Devon, a man distinguished for all virtues, a great commander, and the most faithful of Alfred's friends. Alfred divided Magistrates into Tithing-men, Hundredaries, Trithing-men or Lathgrievs, and Aldermen or Earls.

A TITHING consisted of 10 families. " Every freeman who wished to enjoy the protection of the laws, and not to be treated as a vagabond, was under the necessity of being admitted a member of the tithing where he and his family resided: and in order to obtain this admission, it was as necessary to have supported a good reputation; because all the members of each tithing became mutual pledges and sureties for each other; and the whole tithing surety to the king, for all its members. Each tithing formed within itself, a little state or commonwealth, and chose one of its most respectable members for its head, who received the name of Tithing-man or Borsholder. As all the members of a tithing were mutual sureties, so they were commonly mutual friends, fighting together in the day of battle, and usually eating at one table in time of peace. If one sustained a loss, by fire, the death of cattle, or any other

- " Hear me, for thou wilt never shun to hear
 " A subject pleading. Hear me, my good King!
 " If in thy wisdom thou perceive it vain
 " To dare the unequal fight, I yield assent: 145
 " But, in hereafter times, when I am low,
 " Let not my brave descendants, scornful, say,
 " That, in misfortune, ODDUNE left his Prince,
 " The pride of Christendom, the truest friend
 " That ever friendship greeted. If thou dwell 150
 " Awhile in solitude, let me be near,
 " Who am thy faithful servant. Best of Kings,
 " Grant my request !"
 " It is no common joy,

accident, all the rest contributed to repair the loss : if one of the neighbours became poor, the rest supported him : all the members attended the funerals, marriages and festivals of the tithing, and if one of the members behaved ill, he was formally expelled the society, which was one of the greatest calamities in which a man could be involved, from that moment he sustained a total loss of character, became an outlaw, and was exposed to a thousand insults."

The next superior Magistrate, was called a HUNDREDARY, who presided over a district that contained 10 tithings : it belonged to him to appoint the time and place for the meeting of the hundred court, to preside in that court, to see that its sentences were executed, and to inspect the arms belonging to the hundred. For the performances of these offices, he received one third of all the fines imposed in his court, with a certain quantity of corn from each member, for maintaining his dogs, which destroyed wolves, foxes, and other noxious animals. The Hundredary was the captain of his hundred in time of war, and the civil Magistrate in time of peace. The government of towns and cities was much the same as the hundreds : the chief Magistrate was called the TOWN-GRIEVE, and if it was a sea-port, the PORT-GRIEVE. The next in office above the hundredary, was called the TRITHINGMAN or LATHGRIEVE, who presided over that part of the country which was called a LATH, consisting of three, four, or more hundreds. The next officer to the Trithingman was called an ALDERMAN or EARL. This situation was always filled by a person of the highest dignity and greatest power, who in his district was a little King, and who assumed the title of Sub-king or Prince, in subscribing charters and other deeds. There was a regular chain of appeals between the different courts of judicature. The decision of the TITHING-COURT was liable to be reversed by the HUNDRED-COURT, that of the hundred-court by the TRITHING-COURT, the trithing-court by the SHIRE-COURT, at which the Earl presided, or otherwise his Shiregerieve ; and the decision of the latter was still liable to be reversed by the KING.

" In hour like this," said ALFRED, " to behold 155
 " Thy constancy, oh Chief! but, sad it is
 " To hear the prayer of friendship, and to know
 " That prayer must be denied. My course is fix'd!
 " I by myself will go; no mortal man
 " Shall see, and think of ALFRED. Heaven hath saved
 " In many an hour, when human aid was far;
 " And that same God is still omnipotent.
 " But, though thy words I heed not, yet I ask
 " One further proof of thy good will. Go, thou,
 " Down to my western friends;⁷ what may be done
 " There or elsewhere, I know that thou wilt do.
 " Truly I prize thee, ODDUNE! much, I owe
 " For thy long faithfulness, and much my heart
 " Fain would repay—but, it is yet deny'd."

ODDUNE in sorrow heard, and thus replied. 170
 " Oh kindest master, tho' I fondly hoped
 " Never to leave thee, yet, at thy command,
 " Cheerful would I depart, and trust me, Prince!
 " If prayers could serve thee, thou should'st have my all."
 Which said, he turned to seek the western land. 175

ALFRED beheld him on his way, and thus
 Address'd ALSWITHA, leaning o'er her child,

⁷ West-Saxony were the hereditary dominions of Alfred. This division of the heptarchy, was very small for a long time after it was erected into a kingdom, but having been blessed with a long succession of great Princes, it gradually increased, and at length gave a nominal King to England in the person of Egbert, and a real one in that of Alfred, from whom is descended OUR PRESENT SOVEREIGN, GEORGE III. by the marriage of Henry I. with a daughter of the King of Scotland, whose Mother was a West-Saxon Princess.

Who mournful sat, heedless of all around.
“ A better subject than yon gallant Chief,
“ No King hath honor'd, one, within whose heart 80
“ More constancy prevails, and every grace
“ That visits mortals : many promise fair,
“ Who, in the hour of trial, stand aloof,
“ Or with cold interest serve ; but he, brave man !
“ Displays as dangers thicken, nobler powers, 85
“ And more intense reality of faith,
“ And growing stedfastness. Behold him there !
“ Pacing with solemn step beside the brook,
“ In deep thought exercised, and all for us,
“ For thee and for thy babe, for me and mine,— 90
“ My people, part, and best part of myself.
“ He goes 'mid death and perils ! Heaven will guard
“ Such worth as his from the night-prowling wolf,
“ Or fiercer Dane. If ever Prince should find
“ A man like ODDUNE, let him not rejoice 95
“ That God hath dealt a Crown, but, given a Friend.”

“ What means yon sudden tumult,” cried the King,
As hastening through the troops, in black attire,
A meagre man drew near, who, nothing spake,
Till to the spot where ALFRED stood he came. 100
His garment was a monk's, yet, on his head
A warrior's casque⁸ he wore. “ Whence? and thy name !”

⁸ The casque, or helmet, of the Saxons, was of a conical shape, without vizors, or any other protection to the face than a piece of iron, which reached from the front of the helmet to the point of the nose. These were most commonly worn by horsemen.

Said Alfred, as he seiz'd his good sword's hilt.
The stranger wildly spake. "I am a man
"Of woes unnumber'd, to declare them all, 105
"Would weary thee. My name is DANES-HATE, once,
"And now a monk, but soon to be no more.
"Here do I stand before my noble King,
"The poorest and most abject wretch, whom grief
"Hath with remorseless fury in her hour 110
"Of deepest visitation prey'd upon.
"Behold in me, good Prince! Abbot of Wilton!"
"SIGBERT!" exclaimed the King, "I knew thee not,
"And whence this strange deportment? speak, oh man!"

"Wilton's fair pile," slowly the monk replied,
"Danes have destroyed.⁹ My friends are slain! and now

⁹ Wilton Abbey was greatly enriched by Alfred. In the course of the seventh century many Abbies and Monasteries were founded in all parts of England. "These Monasteries were designed, in some places, for the seats of bishops and their clergy, in others for the residence of secular priests, and in all places they were seminaries for the education of youth. No vows of celibacy or poverty were required of the priests who inhabited these Monasteries, though toward the end of this century, celibacy was strongly recommended to the English monks and clergy, by Theodore, in his Penitentials. These Monasteries being in general well built and well endowed, were by far the most comfortable places of residence in these times; which engaged such numbers of all ranks and characters to crowd into them, that they soon became intolerable grievances. This fondness for the monastic life was much increased by an impious doctrine, which began to be broached about the end of this century, "That as soon as any person put on the habit of a monk, all the sins of his former life would be forgiven." In consequence of being better stored with provisions, and possessing greater riches than other places, Monasteries, in the ninth century were constantly sought after and plundered by the Danes, on which occasion, great numbers of the clergy were put to the sword, or buried in the ruins of the Monasteries; and the mildest fate they could expect, when they fell into the hands of the Danes, was, to be sold for slaves." Between the years 857 and 871, almost all the few remaining Monasteries which had escaped the former ravages of the Danes, were destroyed, and their wretched inhabitants put to the sword or burnt in the flames which consumed their places of abode. In these times the Danes plundered and burnt the Monas-

" Whether these limbs be mangled, this weak head
 " Put on by clumsy artizan, and made
 " To dance thus wonderful, I cannot say :
 " But, such foul sights of blood, and horrible waste
 " Still float before me, that my swimming brain
 " Yet doubts if all be not a very dream ;
 " A dream, and I a pious monk, my cell
 " Beside me. No! oh no! it cannot be!
 " For how should pious monk feel as I do, 225
 " Such fix'd and unextinguishable hate—
 " Such cravings to destroy—such hellish thoughts—
 " Of murder! Know you not, good King! the Danes
 " Are near, aye, very near? I see them in the clouds ;
 " For they like men, need not the sluggish use 230
 " Of bone and sinew when they move to death.
 " The infernal Fiends assist them : listen, King !
 " This is no idle hour, dig thou a cave!
 " This instant dig it, under yon huge hill
 " For thee and for thy subjects. I will stand 235
 " At the dark mouth, and yell a withering tune,—
 " A tune about the Danes, and their mad deeds,—
 " A tune that shall to flight put all but imps
 " And Hell's black brood: but if they still approach,
 " Then will these eyes dart flames, these hands uprear

teries of Bardney, Croyland, Peterborough and Ely, putting to death the whole of the inhabitants. They also destroyed the Monks of Beverly, and the Monasteries of Whitby and Gilling. London was taken by the Danes in the reign of Ethelwolf, and the inhabitants massacred. Bath, Frome, besides many other Towns, and Villages unnumbered, in the West-Saxon kingdom, were also taken and destroyed by the Danes.

" The mountain rock; seize the stupendous oaks,
 " And on the Danes, hurl them, or in my might
 " Grasp the Almighty's thunder. Pardon, King!
 " This fever of the brain doth haunt me so
 " That I forget my very name and place." 245

He said, and roll'd his starting eye-balls round,
 In fearful vacancy. The King, amazed,
 Beheld the sight, and mark'd him earnestly,
 Then, turning, with a sigh, thus spake. " Oh God!
 " Whatever punishment thou may'st inflict, 250
 " To cleanse from sin's deep stain—Almighty sire,
 " Preserve my reason! Take whate'er thou wilt,
 " But spare, oh spare my reason!" As he spake
 The Monk more calm appear'd; when, ALFRED cried,
 " SIGBERT! if memory serve, declare how thus 255
 " The Danes became possess'd of that fair place,
 " Which I had fondly hoped the quiet spot
 " Where, after some few years, I might have slept¹⁰
 " Peaceful, 'till that great day, when, from the dust,
 " All men shall rise. Speak of this woeful change!"

" In Wilton's pious house," the Monk began,
 " I govern'd righteously. From morn to night,
 " We chanted forth Heaven's praises, fed the poor,
 " And taught the ignorant,¹¹ and lived, methinks,

¹⁰ Alfred was a great Benefactor to the Monastery of Wilton, situated near Salisbury, in Wiltshire.

¹¹ "When Alfred commenced his reign, England was in the profoundest ignorance. Learning which had begun to decline about the middle of the eighth century, was almost quite ex-

" As God would have us live. We heard of wars, 265
 " Rumours of wars and strifes from passing pilgrim,
 " Or from the men who roved from land to land,
 " Driving their flocks and herds to 'scape the Danes:
 " Who, as they journey'd on their toilsome way,
 " Oft-times to listen, stood; and gazed around, 270

tingished in the ninth, and that general darkness which had been a little dissipated by the appearance of Aldhelm, Beda, Egbert, Cædman, Alcuinous and John Scot, returned again. Alfred in one of his letters to Wulfsig bishop of Worcester, regrets the ignorance of the age he lived in, in the following words: " At my accession to the throne (871) all knowledge and learning was extinguished in the English nation, insomuch, that there were very few to the South of the Humber who understood the common prayers of the church (for two hundred years before, learning had been almost confined to Northumberland) or were capable of translating a single sentence of Latin into English, but to the South of the Thames (including his own dominions of West-Saxons) I cannot recollect so much as one who could do this." Alfred the great, therefore appeared at a time and under circumstances the most unfavourable that can be conceived for the acquisition of learning, when the small remains of science were wholly confined to cloisters, and when knowledge was considered as a disgrace rather than an ornament to a prince. We accordingly find that his education was totally neglected, when by accident the queen his mother shewed her four sons (of whom Alfred was the youngest) a book of Saxon Poems, saying, " I will present this book to him who learns to read it first." This exciting Alfred's emulation, he zealously applied himself, and soon was not only able to read, but had learned to repeat the whole of the Poems, and received the book as his reward. From that time he possessed an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and reading and study became his chief delight. But still he met with great difficulties for want of proper help. " I have heard him (says Asser) lament it with many sighs, as the greatest misfortune of his life, that when he was young, and had leisure for study, he could find no masters to instruct him. For some years before and several years after his accession to the throne, he was so incessantly engaged in wars against the Danes, that he had little time for study, but of that little he did not lose a moment. When he had restored the tranquillity of his country, he redoubled his efforts to improve his mind in knowledge. By this constant application, Alfred became one of the greatest scholars of the age in which he lived. He spoke the Latin language with as much fluency as his native tongue, and understood though he did not speak Greek. He was an eloquent speaker, an acute philosopher, an excellent mathematician, musician, historian and architect, and the prince of the Saxon Poets. Alfred did not prosecute his studies as a private man, and for his own improvement only, but as a great prince, and for the benefit of his subjects, whose ignorance he beheld with unspeakable concern. The erudition which Alfred acquired, he employed like a great and good king, in composing original works, and in translating others out of Latin into the Saxon. Alfred did not however neglect the most effectual mode of reviving learning among his subjects, namely, by erecting and endowing schools and other seminaries, of which Oxford is a glorious example."

" Cautious, to see if Danes approach'd. These men
 " Declared such deeds of the invading foe,
 " That, to believe them possible, we strove
 " But could not, such our confidence in Heaven.
 " At length, upon an eve, no longer left 275
 " To rumour, we beheld the fatal Danes,
 " Fierce for destructive deeds, shouting,¹² draw near.
 " A holy father ventured to go forth
 " And ask them their design. We saw him slain!
 " Then Death was visible! each call'd on God. 280
 " While on our knees, we saw the ceilings red
 " From the destructive torch that blazed without.
 " We heard the crash of wood! The doors were forced!
 " The Danes rush'd in! the work of death began!
 " Relics and shrines,¹³ all was one overthrow! 285

¹² The Danes always proceeded to attack an enemy with loud shouts, invoking their Gods.

¹³ At the commencement of Alfred's reign, superstition had made great progress; particularly in an extravagant veneration for relics, in which the priests at Rome possessed a very gainful trade, as "few good christians considered themselves safe from the machinations of the Devil, unless they carried the relics of some Saint about their persons, and no church could be dedicated, without a decent portion of this sacred trumpery. Stories of dreams, visions and miracles were propagated without a blush by the clergy, and believed without a doubt by the laity. Extraordinary watchings, fastings and other arts of tormenting the body, in order to save the soul became frequent, and it began to be believed that a journey to Rome was the most direct road to Heaven. It was about this time that some great men who were not very fond of going through the fastings and prayers enjoined by their confessors, proposed to hire poor people to fast and pray in their stead. The remains of all persons who were at all eminent for their piety, were very zealously sought after by the ecclesiastics. As that Monastery which possessed the greatest number of relics and shrines, was most visited by pilgrims, from whom the monks derived considerable advantage." "When Cuthbert, archbishop of Canterbury died, as his predecessors had been interred by the monks of St. Augustine, in their Monastery *without* the walls of Canterbury, they considered his corpse as a sort of perquisite to which they had a right. Cuthbert however, formed the determination of depriving them of his remains, and for that purpose obtained a formal permission from the king, to be buried in his own cathedral *in* Canterbury. When he found his end drawing near, he directed his domestics to pat his

" Oh spare my anguish! spare my labouring heart—

" My brain, burning within. I fled! but how?

" Yes, here I am.

" Mark me, oh gracious King!

" My rage is past, I now can coolly speak, 290

body into the grave the instant he expired, or at least before they published an account of his death; which they accordingly performed. When the monks of St. Augustine, on hearing of the archbishop's death, came in solemn order to take possession of his remains (for the purpose of erecting for him a splendid shrine, conformable to the miracles they expected the relics of so good a man would perform) they were told that he was already buried at his own request in his own church; at which they became most violently enraged, calling him rogue, fox, viper and other opprobrious names." In the eighth century the sale of relics became a very profitable trade to the clergy, and especially to the monks, who were fortunate in making daily discoveries of the precious remains of some departed saint, which they soon converted into gold and silver. In this traffic they had all the opportunities they could desire of imposing counterfeit wares, as it was no easy thing to distinguish the great toe of a saint from that of a sinner, after it had lain some centuries in the grave. In the eleventh century the superstitious attachment to relics became still more remarkable. The pope and the clergy of Rome carrying on a most lucrative trade in them, of which they never wanted an inexhaustible store. Kings, princes and wealthy prelates purchased whole legs and arms of Apostles, or pieces of the real cross, (of which it is said there was a sufficient quantity in the different parts of Europe to build a first rate man of war) while persons of inferior property, were obliged to be contented with the toes and fingers of inferior saints. Agelnoth, archbishop of Canterbury, when he went to Rome in 1021 purchased of the pope an arm of St. Augustine bishop of Hippo, for one hundred talents, or six thousand pounds weight of silver. A sum which may enable us to judge of the knavery of the sellers as well as of the astonishing credulity of the buyers." Nothing characterises the darkness of an age more than its attachment to relics. The completest assemblage that ever appeared, was that probably in the Abbey of St. Dennis, before the revolution. LUTHER tells us, "The bishop of Mentz bragged that hee had a flame of the bush which Moses beheld burning, and that at Compostel in Spain, they shewed for a holy relique, the ensign of victory which Christ had in Hell." He further tells us, that, "A Dutchman making his confession to a mass priest at Rome, promised by an oath to keep secret whatsoever the priest should impart to him, until he came into Germanie; whereupon, the priest gave him a leg of the Ass on which Christ rode into Jerusalem, very neatly bound up in a silken cloth, and said, This is the holy relique on which the Lord Christ corporally did sit, and with his sacred legs touched this Asses' leg. Then was the Dutchman wondrous glad, and carried the same holy relique with him into Germanie. Now when he came upon the borders, hee bragged of his holy relique, in the presence of *four* others, his commarades, and shewed it unto them, when it appeared, each of them had likewise received a leg of the same Ass from the same priest, upon which they concluded with great admiration, that that Ass had five legs."

- " Tell thee my purport, like a wise man, calm : 370
" As thou behold'st me, not one soul remains
" Of all my friends, the Danes have slaughter'd them!
" Name that distorts my sinews, makes thy sword
" Leap from its sheath! I see it leap! it thirsts
" For danish blood, as I do now; aye thirst, 375
" Intensely thirst, and I will have my fill."

He said, and in an instant rais'd his scarf,
And cast it to the air, and underneath,
'Mid wild astonishment, discover'd hid
A warrior's armour. Thus again he spake: 380
" This armour was a chieftain's whom I saw
" Slain on the moor; I seized it, put it on;
" And having found thee, after tedious search,
" Here do I swear, aye, by the Holy God,
" Whose servant still I am—whose voice hath call'd
" SIGBERT to wars and strife, that I will now
" Live for one object, let one only hope
" Dwell in my breast; and if perchance, the thought
" Of home destroy'd—friends slain—or country wrong'd
" Should cross my mind, with craving appetite, 390
" Loud will I call for blood! my very joints
" Shall snap for ecstasy at danish blood."

He ceas'd: convulsions heaved his frame, his hands
Clench'd each the other. When the King replied.

- " SIGBERT! thy words are rash, thou hast not yet
" Learn'd that great precept, greatest, most divine—

"The spirit of the Deity himself—

"Thy foes to pity."

Cried the wondering monk, 320

"Pity the Danes!" When ALFRED spake, "e'en Danes!

"For He, our Master, taught us, when he said,

"To men more sunk, more lost than Danes themselves,

"Father! forgive, they know not what they do."

"And thou should'st copy him. For Danes, I pray 325

"Most ardently that God would change their hearts

"And give me peace. "Yet," said the indignant king,

"If these fierce Normanders¹⁴—these savage men

"Will waste our land, and drench our happy isle

"With unoffending blood, and seek our lives, 330

"And thirst for murder; be our arms absolved,

"And let them perish by the avenging sword!

"A sinking of the spirit chills my frame:

"This remedy vainly our swords have try'd!

"Armies of bravest Saxons have expired 335

"Striving for this; and yet the Pirates triumph!¹⁵

¹⁴ The vast extent of Scandinavia, in the ninth century, was divided among many different people, who were little known to the rest of the world, and who were only described by some general name, of which the most common was Norman or Normanders, that is, men from the North. Normandy in France received its name from having been peopled by these Normans.

¹⁵ PIRATE was the general name by which all the inhabitants of the North were distinguished, who had any intercourse with Britain. Such, for many years, had been the atrocities of these pirates on the different coasts of England, that their very name struck terror into the inhabitants, and occasioned the parts wherever they landed to be immediately evacuated by the natives. In their first inroads they consisted of the refuse of all the maritime parts of Germany, of Goths, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Frisians, and others from the banks of the Rhine. Who "rejecting labour and civil habitation, gave themselves to no other course of life, nor sought they other sustentation, than only theft, robbery and violence, practising the use of

" The strife is o'er! the bitter cup is drank!
 " We yield to God!" SIGBERT replied, " Oh King!
 " Thou sayest right, but, difficult it is
 " To know the right and to perform it too." 340

When ALFRED thus address'd his army round.
 " Friends! brethren! subjects! you, whose gallant deeds
 " So oft have check'd the Danes; so oft have made
 " Their monstrous bucklers¹⁶ feel the heavy weight

shipping for the love of piracie, and like flights of wasps or hornets, coasting all about; whatsoever fertile place, by any, was discovered, the whole swarm soon seized upon it, and made a prey of the plenty, sucking out the sweet of others labour, and devouring whatsoever others industry had with their sweat prepared." The maritime spirit of the Danes increased so much under the reign of Regner Lodbrog, that during his time, more of his subjects dwelt on the sea than on the land. The resentment therefore of Ivar and Hubba, from the premature death of their father, was proportioned to their capacity for doing mischief, the full force of which, Alfred at this time experienced.

¹⁶ The Danish bucklers were most commonly made of wood, bark or leather, except for commanders or warriors of distinction, which then were made of iron or brass, ornamented with rude painting or sculpture, often finely gilt, and sometimes covered over with silver or gold. The Danes very highly estimated their shields, and ordained great penalties for those who lost them in battle. They were commonly of a long oval form, *the height of the bearer*, in order to protect him from arrows, darts and stones. " Their shields were made use of to carry the dead to the grave, to terrify the enemy by clashing their arms against them, and to form upon occasion a kind of shelter or tent when they were obliged to encamp in the open field. Nor was the shield less useful in naval encounters; for if the fear of falling into the enemies' hands obliged one of their warriors to cast himself into the sea, he could easily escape by swimming upon his buckler. Lastly, they sometimes made a rampart of their shields by locking them one within another in the form of a circle; and at the end of a campaign they suspended them against the walls of their houses, as the most valuable decoration with which they could adorn them. It was the most noble employment in which a hero could spend his leisure, to polish his shield, and to represent upon it either some gallant feat, or some emblematical figure expressive of his own inclinations or exploits: and this served to distinguish him, when being armed at all points, his helmet concealed his face. It was not allowed for all warriors indiscriminately to carry a shield thus painted or carved. When a young man was enlisted, he was presented with a white and smooth buckler, which was called the " shield of expectation," this was carried, till by some signal exploit, he had obtained permission from his commander to have proofs of his valour engraved upon it. For this reason, few but princes or persons distinguished by their services, attempted to carry shields adorned with any symbol:

" Of your good swords; forget not, now, your strength!
 " Tho' forced to yield the contest, and thus roam
 " From wood to wood, from wild to wild, the prey
 " Of secret dread, and hard disquietude;
 " Hold not your courage light, for you have fought
 " As brave and well for life and liberty, 350
 " As ever mortals fought. Your noble deeds,
 " In martial fame, shall be recorded high;
 " And every Saxon, who, in coming years,
 " Dwells on the tale, shall cry, " A better fate
 " The good ne'er merited; a harder fate 355
 " The bad ne'er gain'd;" but, it is right and well!
 " It is God's work! Do I this language hold,
 " To shrink from danger? Have I not endured,
 " Aye, with the meanest of you, hunger, cold;—
 " The beating tempest, wind, and hail, and rain? 360
 " When have I shunn'd the Danes, their black' array,
 " Their furious onset? or, amid the fight,
 " Stood motionless, and not display'd my sword?
 " This have I done; yet numbers have o'erpower'd.
 " Awhile we shun the battle; certain death
 " Awaits my gallant subjects, if they more
 " With the fierce Dane contend; we now must haste
 " Each to his secret place."

for it is to be presumed, that common soldiers could not obtain a distinction, of which the
 grandees were so jealous, without having displayed some feat of indisputable valour. Even
 so early as the expedition of the Cimbri, the greatest part of the army, according to Plutarch,
 had only plain bucklers. In following times, but not till long after, these symbols which
 illustrious warriors had adopted, passing from father to son, produced in the North, as well as
 all over Europe, hereditary coats of arms."

The Monarch ceased;
 For, as he strove to say—"Subjects! farewell," 370
 His big heart throb'd, and hard and difficult
 Was it to check his grief. Upon his cheek
 Anguish was visible, and all around
 Mark'd the tumultuous throe, which, like the wave
 That calleth up the spirit of another, 375
 Made their eyes dim, and for a moment each
 Put off the hero. ALFRED broke the silence,
 And thus exclaim'd: "It was a passing cloud!
 "Once more are we ourselves—no season this
 "For woman's feeling. We must meet our fate 380
 "Firm, as befitteth men.

"I would advise,
 "And my advice, e'en now, will not be spurn'd,
 "I know it will not! that you all depart
 "To the near forest Selwood,¹⁷ there abide; 385
 "Construct a fort,¹⁸ and live in amity:

¹⁷ At the time the Romans invaded Britain, there were three great forests in it. The Caledonian forest, and the forest of the Coritani, which contained several towns, and the seat of a whole nation within it, and included nearly the five counties of Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Rutland; but the third was still larger than either, and swept across the South of the Island, to the extent of one hundred and fifty miles, ranging from Somersetshire into Kent. In the ninth century great encroachments had been made on these forests, the most southern of which was divided into many distinct ones, bearing different names, of which Selwood was one, lying in Wiltshire. The whole of Europe was nearly as much covered with forests as this Island; the most remarkable of which was the Hercynian, extending from Switzerland to Transylvania, sixty day's journey in length, and twelve in breadth.

¹⁸ Alfred was the first of the Saxon Kings who was sensible of the imperfect state of fortification throughout the kingdom, and endeavoured to provide a remedy. He spent much of his time and revenue in re-building the ruined walls of London and other cities, which had been destroyed by the Danes, and in building forts in different convenient places, for the

" The cottagers both far and near will know
 " Where their defenders are, and bring them food.
 " The time may come, when to your former homes
 " You may return triumphant; but, away! 390
 " Ye unsubstantial visions! Though my feet
 " Join not your company, if hope should rise—
 " Like as the thunder follows the bright flash
 " Of heaven, so will I follow hope and stand
 " First at my post. Till then—subjects, farewell!"

He said, and instant shouts re-echoed far,
 " To Selwood!" Selwood! cried they, " Prosper still,
 " Oh God! our blessed King!" and on they march'd:
 When, cold at heart, ALFRED approach'd to greet
 His Queen, ALSWITHA. On a stone she sat 400
 Bended to earth, over her infant child
 That on her breast was leaning quietly.
 He came, and said, " ALSWITHA!" up she rose,
 And seem'd like one awaked from a long dream:

protection of his subjects. " What shall I say (says Asser his cotemporary) of the cities which he repaired, and of the royal forts and castles which he built of stone and wood, with admirable art; in doing which he met with much opposition and trouble from the indolence of his people, who could not be persuaded to submit to any labour for the common safety? How often and how earnestly did he beseech, entreat, and at length command and threaten his bishops, aldermen and nobles to imitate his example, and build castles for the defence of themselves, their families and friends? but alas, such was their invincible sloth and inactivity, that all his persuasions, commands and threats had little influence on them; and they either did not build at all, or did not begin to build till it was too late. It is true indeed, when they beheld their parents, children, wives, friends and servants killed or taken prisoners, and their goods and property destroyed, they bewailed their own folly, and applauded the prudence of their sovereign, whom they had before reproached." In consequence of the few and imperfect fortifications in this island, it greatly facilitated the operations of the Danes.

BOOK II.

59

Her eyes were wild, and eagerly she gazed 405
Around, then said. "Alone, my King! my Husband!"
"Yes," he replied, "and we must now go forth
"To find another home. Give me thy child,
"Thus early taught to suffer," She obey'd,
And they together sought the neighbouring heath. 410

END OF BOOK II.

ALFRED. BOOK III.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED, in wandering over the heath, meets a Cripple, with whom he divides his only loaf. Arrives at Glastonbury Abbey, leaves Alswitha and his infant boy there, and departs alone to seek some obscure retreat.

“THOU lovely Moon!” cried ALFRED, as he moved
Across the trackless down, all wide and waste,
Bearing his infant child. ALSWITHA leaned
Upon his arm, for they had wandered long,
And it was night. “Thou lovely Moon,” he cried, 5
“How calm thou art! thou journeyest on thy way,
“Nor heed’st the many mists that now and then
“Awhile conceal thee, for thou passest on,
“Casting thine eye, disdainful, at the clouds,
“The low and scattered clouds that fain would hide 10
“Thy majesty. And have not I a mind
“More vast than is yon orb? an intellect
“That ranges unconfined, through time and space,
“Scorning their narrow limits? What is this,
“This thinking faculty that acts and plans 15
“Within me? Is it not, ere long, ordain’d
“To cast aside its fetters and assert
“Its native dignity? I know it is!
“Aye in those regions, where thou sit’st enthroned

BOOK III.

61

- " In empyrean glory, lovely Moon ! 20
 " I feel a sudden and mysterious calm
 " Shoot through my frame. This mind will copy thee !
 " Go on, ye grovelling clouds ! increase in size
 " And number ! gather round my head, and strive
 " To hide that light eternal ! call the winds, 25
 " And tempests to your aid ! yet, undisturb'd,
 " I will behold your impotence, and smile.
 " Sorrows and pangs of frail humanity !
 " Upon the wings of ages do ye fly,
 " Fast as the mists of night, whilst I shall live 30
 " Clad in the robe of immortality
 " When yon bright orb is quench'd."

The King, a joy,

As meditating thus on lofty themes,
 Felt cheer his heart, but, soon the busy thoughts
 Of his own cares, his country's wrongs, rush'd in, 35
 And he was sad. Mournful, he saw his child
 Who on his Father's arms lay wondering
 At that big lamp on high, whose tranquil beams,
 On every side shone luminous. And now
 With new delight he laughs aloud to see 40
 The full-orb'd Moon, and leaps with sudden start
 Of infant gratulation. ALFRED spake.
 " We now are wandering far, and lest this garb,
 " Still bearing marks of royalty, though worn
 " And half obscured, should tell my name and state ; 45
 " Here will I leave it : on this barren heath,
 " To moulder and endure the winds of Heaven.

"Thy dress is simple, thou hast nought to fear."
When on the ground the King his mantle cast. 50

Now morning light shone in the eastern sky.
"Thou dost not speak to me," said ALFRED, "speak
"That I may know thy voice, and cease to fear
"That thou art sorrowful." ALSWITHA said
"I cannot speak, but to confess thy kindness." 55

Whilst wandering thus, unknowing where, they saw
A moving shape, that in the early dawn
Seem'd coming toward them. Travelling slow it was,
And in such guise, that to compare its form
And size and motion, to familiar thing, 60
They could not, "Quick! my Lord." ALSWITHA cried,
"I do not like its dark appearance, soon
"We shall have pass'd this spot, for from our right
"It comes, and we are first." "Nay, fear it not,"
Said ALFRED, musing—"let us wait awhile, 65
"To see and satisfy our doubting minds."
The Queen exclaim'd. "With danger, sport not thus!
"For on so wild a heath, what shapes may roam,¹
"At this still hour, thick with the morning dew,
"We cannot say. Haste, pray thee, haste." "Not so,"
Answer'd the King, "for he who trusts in God,
"All times alike, needs nothing fear." She heard
And a few steps paced on alone, then thought

¹ Agreeable to the superstition of the times, when the universal agency of supernatural beings was credited, and the most common appearances ascribed to its influence.

Upon her child, and to the King return'd
To share his fortune.

As they communed thus, 75
The doubtful form drew nearer, till at length
A Cripple, dragging his weak limbs appear'd.
"Oh, pity me!" he cried! "it was most kind
"To stop on this wide down to hear my tale,
"For I am poor, and hunger in my breast 80
"Aloud doth call for bread. Have ye no food
"To give an old man? "yes," the King replied,
"And thou shalt have a part." ALSWITHA said,
"A small part, husband, for thou knowest well
"How scarce it is, and on this trackless moor 85
"Our babe may cry in vain. I weep for age,
"And, for myself, would give him all the loaf,
"For we have only one; but, then, the child!
"Bethink you of the child, and of thine own
"Hard wants." The King no answer made, but took
The little scrip, and open'd it, and said;
"This is our all, old man! one half is thine!"²

² "While Alfred and Alswitha resided in the Isle of Ethelney, or Æthelingey, it happened one day during the winter, which proved uncommonly severe, that he had dismissed all his attendants to endeavour to obtain provisions. When they were gone, the king, as was his custom whenever he had an opportunity, took a book and began reading, whilst Alswitha was employed in her domestic concerns. They had not long continued thus engaged, before a poor pilgrim, accidentally passing that way, knocked at the door, and begged they would give him something to eat. The humane king called to Alswitha, and desired her to give the poor man part of what provision they had; the queen finding only one loaf, brought it to Alfred, at the same time representing the distresses the family would labour under should their party return unsuccessful. The king, not deterred, by this scanty view, from his charitable purpose, cheerfully gave the poor pilgrim one half of the loaf: telling Alswitha at the same time, that his dependance was upon Providence. Soon after, his friends returned with an abundant supply." The name of this pilgrim, we are told, was NIDOR.

And ALFRED parted it. "God prosper thee!"
 Replied the aged man, then fast assuaged
 Imperious hunger.

95

ALFRED turn'd the while,
 And to the Queen thus spake: "Hear, best beloved!
 "Words that from mildness spring. 'Tis well to guard
 "The plant Humanity: tender, its leaves,
 "And he who checks their wild luxuriance, 100
 "Will find them pine, and, from the unfriendly soil,
 "At length, slow die away. Proud man supports
 "His boasted independence, and would fain—
 "Prying in cold futurity's grey dawn,
 "Plan for himself, and govern, free of Heaven. 105
 "That Being who surveys all mortal things,
 "Best knows our wants; He sees them manifest,
 "While yet they have no name, and, on the heart
 "Whose trust he is, bestows, if seem him right,
 "The flattering good, but given or refused 110
 "'Tis done in mercy. Let us look to God,
 "And do his will, and we shall have enough
 "Of food and raiment, more we must not hope,
 "Nor need desire." ALSWITHA wept consent,
 And faltering answer'd—"Give the poor man all!
 "We trust in God."

The beggar now approach'd
 His benefactors, and with grateful words
 Thank'd them full oft. "Now, pray thee," said the King,
 "How camest thou here? we have some time to spare,
 "And as we journey, freely tell thy tale,
 "For we are friends." The old man bow'd, and spake.

My name is NIDOR ; far o'er yonder Tor*
 " My dwelling was; a hut of humbler sort,
 " Yet, such as I could love, for it was warm; 125
 " And there was space to sit beside the fire,
 " Or turn the spindle, and without were heap'd
 " Faggots and straw to last till Candlemas.³
 " Upon the top of a green sloping hill
 " Our hamlet stood, whilst in the vale beneath 130
 " Another hamlet rose, and they were called
 " The sister villages. A lovely spot!
 " Such as the Traveller would stop to view
 " Over and over, but would nothing say,
 " Sorrowing to leave, yet loath to look again 135
 " Lest he should cease to be a traveller.
 " From youth to age beside my cottage door
 " A yew-tree waved, under whose spreading shade
 " I oft have sat, and view'd the glorious sun,
 " Smiling with all around me; mark'd the hills 140
 " In the blue distance, over which these feet
 " In earlier days had wandered, stranger then
 " To every malady. It was a tree

* See Note 13.

³ Though coal was known both to the Romans as well as Britons, yet it does not appear to have been generally used as fuel in this Island. For ages after its discovery, wood was preferred, probably from the extensive tracks of forest with which the country abounded, presenting a ready and almost inexhaustible supply. In the year 852, a grant was made of some lands by the Abbey of Peterborough, under the reservation of certain boons and payments in kind to the Monastery, as "one night's entertainment, ten vessels of Welsh and two of common ale; sixty cart loads of wood, and twelve of pit-coal," from which the proportionate consumption may pretty accurately be judged of.

" Unmatch'd through all the country. When a youth
 " I loved it, there it was my happiest days 145
 " Pass'd on unconscious, for I only thought
 " Upon succeeding joys, that ever came,
 " Uncall'd, because no sorrow would o'ercast
 " The morning of my hopes. How many an hour
 " Have I reclined myself in that cool tree, 150
 " And carved my name, while yet in boy-hood years
 " And sung the merry song, or, with my lute,
 " Piped to the dancing villagers, and made
 " Tottering Four-score forget his load of care,
 " Half young again! But, I am talking wild; 155
 " These pleasant thoughts so fill an old man's mind,
 " That he could dwell forever on them. Now
 " My tongue a heavier tale shall tell. Three nights
 " Before the wane of yonder moon, scarce seen,
 " There came a noise! some, rushing out, beheld 160
 " Our neighbouring hamlet all on flames, we heard
 " The cry of dying infants, and the shriek
 " Of mothers, till at length no sound was heard.
 " By the unpitying Danes—they all were slain.
 " On bed I lay, a cripple many a year, 170
 " Or, used to move with crutches, such as these.
 " My friends escaped, and it appear'd most hard
 " To lie, and all alone, receive my end—
 " Fast coming; so I rose, unusual strength

* The Danes exercised in this Island the most inhuman cruelties, " rioting in the blood of men, women and children, and making spoil as well as prey of every thing that came into their hands."

" Seem'd to possess me, and remembering well, 175
 " That in the Isle of Ethelney I had
 " As good a son as ever Father priz'd,
 " Bounteous to all, as far as his low cot
 " Might deal in bounty; I prepared to seek
 " His dwelling. Here I am thus on my way, 180
 " But never farther had I gone; this moor
 " Would soon have proved old NIDOR's bed of death,
 " But for your aid, good christians! Pardon me!
 " I never saw your faces till this hour,
 " Nor know your names, nor whither ye are bound 185
 " In these most perilous times; but, if no house,
 " No better house should wait you, by my troth
 " My son's, shall be your dwelling. Haste with me!
 " And you shall find good cheer, tho' humble; come.
 " I pray you come!" 190

ALFRED uncertain stood;

When, as he paus'd there to his sight appear'd
 A stately pile, of which the King inquired.

" It is," said NIDOR, " Glastonbury, famed;

5 It is generally acknowledged that the first Christian Church, which appeared in this Island, was built at Glastonbury. Some historians have zealously maintained, that after the ascension of our Lord, the scribes and pharisees having raised a persecution in Jerusalem against the faithful, and having put to death Stephen the proto-martyr, the rest of Christ's disciples were dispersed into many different nations: when St. Philip proceeded into the country of the Franks, converted and baptized many; and being zealous to propagate the faith, chose 12 of his disciples, and sent them as missionaries into Britain, who arrived in the year 63, under the immediate subjection of JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA: on which occasion the first Church at Glastonbury was built. In after ages, Glastonbury Abbey became famous for the number of its splendred shrines, for the magnificence of its structure, and for the wealth and liberality of its ecclesiastics. The Abbot lived in a princely manner, having the title of *Lord*, and a seat in parliament. The revenue of the Abbey at the time of the Reformation, it is said, amounted to forty thousand pounds per annum, besides seven large parks, well stocked

" O'er all the land; where holy Monks abide; 195

" And where the singing is both night and day.⁶

" By this I see my path is to the left,

" And yours, I trust."

" I cannot go thy way,"

with deer. The last Abbot (Richard Whiting) who had one hundred monks and three hundred domestics, was hanged in his pontificals, with two of his monks, on the Tor, a high hill in the neighbourhood, for refusing to take the oath of supremacy to Henry the 8th.

6 " The public worship of the Anglo-Saxons, consisted chiefly in Psalmody; in which both the clergy and laity took much delight. In some cathedrals, and larger monasteries, this exercise was continued night and day without intermission, by a constant succession of priests and singers, with whom the laity occasionally joined. " Both the ears and minds (says an excellent antiquary) of the people of all ranks, were so much charmed with the incessant melody of the Monks, that it contributed not a little to increase their zeal and liberality in building Monasteries." This taste for Psalmody very much increased after the introduction of organs into churches, in the ninth century, " Whose pipes of copper (an historian of that age says) being winded by bellows, and furnished with proper stops and keys, sent forth a most loud and ravishing music, that was heard at great distance."

Even the private devotions of the good people of those times, consisted almost entirely in singing a prodigious number of psalms; which was esteemed the most effectual way of appeasing the wrath of Heaven, and making an atonement for their own sins, or the sins of their friends, living or dead. It was commonly an article in those voluntary associations, called *Gilds* or *Fraternities*, so frequent among the Anglo-Saxons, that each member should sing two psalms every day, one for all the members of the fraternity that were living, and another for all who had been members, but were dead; and that at the death of a member, each of the surviving should sing six psalms for the repose of his soul. All kinds of penances might be redeemed by singing a sufficient number of psalms and pater-nosters. For example, if a penitent was condemned to fast a certain number of days, he might redeem as many of them as he pleased, at the rate of singing six pater-nosters, and the 119th psalm, six times over for one day's fast. In a word, psalm-singing was a kind of spiritual cash in those times, and answered the same purpose in religion which money did in trade." At the death of a bishop, it was deemed, at the council of *Ceale-hytbe*, held in the ninth century, " that a tenth part of all his moveable effects, both within and without doors, should be given to the poor; that all his English slaves should be set at liberty; that at the sounding of the signal in the several parish churches, the people of the parish should repair to the church, and there say thirty psalms for the soul of the deceased; that every bishop and abbot should cause *six hundred psalms to be sung*, and one hundred and twenty masses to be celebrated, and that each of them should set at liberty three slaves, and give each of them three shillings; that all the servants of God should fast one day, and that for thirty days, immediately after divine service, in every church, seven belts of pater-nosters should be sung for the death of the said bishop."

The King replied. "The place in view, I seek; 200
 "But I return with feelings of good will,
 "Thy kind proposal. Thine the friendly words,
 "Such as we Saxons loved, before the Danes
 "Made cold our hearts, and taught us to respect
 "Our wants while yet uncertain. Take my prayers,
 "Thou good old man! my unfeigned gratitude,
 "And health attend thee." Many greetings kind
 Then each exchanged of blessings and of hopes,
 And thus they parted.

Whilst they paced along 210
 Upon the Abbey gazing with delight,
 Whose circling arches rose majestic,⁷

⁷ Architecture had made considerable progress in Britain by the ninth century; St. Peter's of York was a most noble structure, as was also Rippon in Yorkshire: but the most famous building in this Island was the cathedral church of Hexham in Northumberland, of which an old historian thus speaks: "Its deep foundations and the many subterraneous rooms there artfully disposed, and above ground, the great variety of buildings to be seen, all of hewn stone, and supported by sundry kinds of pillars and many porticos; and set off by the surprising length and height of the walls, surrounded with various mouldings and bands curiously wrought, and the turnings and windings of the passages, sometimes ascending, or descending by winding stairs to the different parts of the building, all which it is not easy to express or describe by words &c. neither is there any church of the like sort to be found on this side the Alps." From the estimation in which Glastonbury has always been held, no doubt can be entertained, of its having been equal, or nearly so, to any building of the kind in England, although the works of no historian has reached us which gives a particular description of the Abbey as it stood in the ninth century. Edgar and many other of the Saxon kings were buried here, as was also the British king Arthur, whose tomb was discovered by the following accident. Henry the second, who was the first of the Plantagenet line, being, in the last year of his reign at Pembroke, and hearing there a Welsh bard singing to his harp the story of Arthur, concluded with an account of his death and burial at Glastonbury, between two pyramids: the king instantly gave orders that the matter should be enquired into, and the body dug up. This being done as the king directed, at the depth of seven feet was found a large stone, whereon was fastened a leaden cross with this inscription in Latin, on the inside. "Here lies the famous king Arthur, buried in the Isle of Avalon." Digging still lower, they found the king's body in the trunk of a tree, his beautiful queen lying by him, with long flowing hair, in colour bright as gold, which however sank into dust when touched. The king's bones were very

And lofty turrets, casting round a shade
 Of grandeur, silent and sublime ; the King,
 Raising his hand, thus to ALSWITHA spake : 215
 " This is a place of refuge ! joy it yields
 " To my distracted mind, to meet a house
 " So firm and durable. ALSWITHA, hear !
 " This shall be thy abode ; whilst I must haste
 " To cot obscure, conceal'd in forest shade, 220
 " Whose calmness shall prepare my harrass'd mind
 " To ponder, with stern thought upon the ways
 " Before me, thus, to shun approaching ill,
 " Or seize on fortune. Hast thou aught to say ?"

ALSWITHA answer'd, " Husband ! thou for whom
 " My heart has never ceas'd to feel, since first
 " From Mercia's soil I came ; oh pity me !⁸
 " Nor add a weight too heavy to be borne
 " At this hard time. I leave thee, ALFRED ! leave
 " My only friend ! behold thee go amid 230
 " Ten thousand secret perils, and endure
 " That keenest of all ills—uncertainty !
 " It cannot be !"

large sized, and in his skull were ten wounds, all cicatrized, except that of which he died. This discovery was made in the year 1189, as Giraldus Cambrensis tells us, who saw these bones, and examined the whole affair attentively. There was also a table containing this story, set up in the Monastery of Glastonbury, and the leaden cross with the inscription remained there till the dissolution of the Monastery, where it was seen by the great antiquary Leland.

⁸ Some Historians say, Alswitha was the daughter of the king of Mercia, others, that she was the daughter of Ethelred the great, a West-Saxon earl.

When, earnest, thus the King:

- “ALSWITHA! dearly do I hold thy love, 235
“Thy true affection; dearly do I prize
“Thy presence, but, the thought of self, of joys
“That to myself belong, at hour like this,
“When Britain groans and bleeds, were weak indeed.
“I, for my people, live, to see their wrongs 240
“Redress’d; to scourge the Danes, to raise again
“The frighted forms of peace and happiness,
“And place the crown, safe on this infant’s head,
“Who little knows his danger, or the pangs
“That goad his parents! This is my design; 245
“For this I live; for this I sacrifice
“All other dear delights, and, not the least,
“Thy smiles and counsel.

Boldly cried the Queen,

- “Uncommon times, demand uncommon deeds, 250
“And lofty resolution. Firm and well
“Hast thou declared, and truly I revere
“Thy spirit, unsubdued by time and chance,
“And all the little storms, that vulgar minds
“Toss and o’erwhelm. Thou judgest right, oh King!
“Go to thy place of hiding; there behold,
“Tranquil, the tempest riding high through Heaven;
“Though fierce, it will not always last, and seize
“The hour of sun-shine to come forth, and sing
“The song of triumph; but, regard me, King! 260
“I will not leave thee! I unmoved can bear
“The cold and the rough wind, and beating rain;

" These bring no terrors to my heart, I live,
 " Beneath thy sight; away from thee, I die.
 " If with vain fear thou shudder at the snares 265
 " That lurk for wandering woman, I will clothe
 " These limbs in iron mail, or with the garb
 " Of man, and look such terrors to the eye
 " Of prying curiosity, that all
 " Should stand at awful distance, and behold 270
 " My frown, and tremble. Say not nay, oh King!
 " Beloved Friend and Husband!"

ALFRED thus:

" Though difficult, I must and do say, nay.
 " Thou canst not go with me! I have a path 275
 " Before me, hazardous, of such a kind,
 " That one alone can venture. Canst thou climb
 " The mountain precipice, and rob the nest
 " Of eagles for thy food?⁹ Canst thou contend,
 " With prowling wolves, and, on the topmost branch
 " Of lonely tree, watch till returning light,
 " Nor dare to dream of hardships?"
 " I can climb
 " The mountain precipice, and rob the nest
 " Of eagles for my food! I can contend 285
 " With prowling wolves, and, on the topmost branch

⁹ Eagles formerly were more common in this Island than they are at present. " Smith, in his history of Kerry, relates, that a poor man got a comfortable subsistence for his family, during a summer of famine out of an eagle's nest, by robbing the eagles of the food which the old ones brought, whose attendance he protracted beyond the natural time, by clipping the wings and retarding the flight of the former." This practice is said to be still common in the north of Europe. Two infants were once carried off by eagles from a village in Scotland.

“ Of lonely tree, watch till returning light,
“ Nor dare to dream of hardships; if, my Lord!
“ That thou be near me,” said the weeping Queen.
“ Hear one objection yet,” ALFRED replied. 290
“ If thou canst do these things—can this thy babe?”
ALSWITHA smote her breast, and answer’d not.

Near them they now beheld the Abbey walls,
Awhile forgotten. ALFRED thus: “ ’Tis meet
“ To pass for travellers. Yon pious men 295
“ Our wants will aid; and grant asylum fit¹⁰
“ For thee and for thy child.” ALSWITHA sigh’d.

When to the door they came, and knock’d—the door
Turn’d on its ponderous hinges, and the sound
Rang through the vaulted roof, and forthwith brought
An aged Father, who inquired the cause
Of their so early visit. ALFRED spake.
“ We are, good Father! come to claim thy prayers
“ And bounty. Through the past night we have walk’d,
“ And, weary, here we stand.” 305

The Monk replied,
“ First follow me, to chant due masses, then
“ For perishable things.” Him they obey’d,
Following thro’ aisles that scarce receiv’d Heaven’s light,

¹⁰ Monasteries were the inns of the age; certain parts of their revenue being applied to the relief of pilgrims and travellers, who were always entertained gratuitously.

'Mid shrines and fretted pillars,¹¹ till at length 310
 They came before the altar. Glimmering rays
 From lonely taper, spread o'er all the place
 A dubious light, a gloom that to the heart
 Convey'd a sudden awe, and many a fear
 Doubtful and undefined. 315

The rites perform'd,
 All pass'd together to the hall where stood
 A table cover'd o'er with food and drinks,
 And each was satisfied: when to the spot
 Where ALFRED thoughtful sat, the Abbot came, 320
 And, with no rude solicitude, inquired
 The cause that made him wander, whence he sped,
 And whither he was bound, in times like those.

¹¹ The shrines of Saints among the Anglo-Saxons were decorated with a profusion of gold and silver ornaments: this occasioned the Danes to seek after them with the greatest avidity. The importance which was attached to the possession of the remains of a Saint, may be judged of by the following narration: "St. WITHBURGA was buried at the village of Derham. The Bishop of Winchester and the Abbot of Ely wanting to get possession of her remains, obtained a licence from the king for that purpose; they however thought it advisable to proceed with caution, as it was likely the inhabitants of the place would not easily part with so valuable a treasure without resistance, if their intention should have been publicly known; and therefore it was concluded, to carry their design into execution with as much secrecy as such an affair would admit. On the day appointed, the Abbot and some of the most active and prudent of the Monks, attended by the servants of the Abbey all well armed, set out on their journey; and on their arrival at Derham were received by the inhabitants with great respect, who imagined they were arrived only to take possession of the place, without suspecting any further object. The Abbot on this occasion held a court for the administration of justice in the usual way: and afterwards invited the people to a feast, having before-hand concerted measures for carrying on his design. At the time fixed, the Abbot and the Monks took occasion to withdraw from the people in the hall, and immediately repaired to the Church, under colour of performing their regular devotions, but in reality to prepare matters for carrying their plan into execution. Night coming on, the company in the hall, having spent the day in feasting, retired by degrees, every one to his rest, whilst the Monks were employed in the Church, in forcing open the tomb of St. Withburga. Having arrived at the body, they got every thing in readiness for carrying it off. About the middle of the night, taking the coffin, in which the remains of the Saint were inclosed, on their shoulders, they conveyed it to a carriage which

A good and hospitable man he was;
 A smile beneficent beam'd o'er his face, 325
 And his mild accent, so disposed the mind
 To kindly feelings, and, like music soft,
 So lull'd the senses, that his words sank deep
 Into all stranger's hearts.

When ALFRED thus : 330

“ Good Father! I am come, my wife and child,
 “ From a loved home, where peace and plenty reign'd,
 “ And never pilgrim-monk unheeded ask'd
 “ For food or raiment; but we left it all,
 “ And fled before the Danes, whose savage rage 335
 “ No power could stand—whose breasts no pity move.
 “ Throughout our native isle, where shall we turn

was provided for that purpose, the servants of the Abbot being placed as guards round about the body, to defend it. In this order they set forward towards Brandon, a village about twenty miles distant, where there is a small navigable river leading towards the *Isle of Ely*; and on their arrival there, they found some boats waiting for them, and immediately embarked with their treasure and set sail.—In the mean time, the inhabitants of Derham having discovered that the body of St. Withburga was carried off by the Monks, the alarm was given, and the Town's folk came flocking together; all agreed to pursue them, and if possible, to recover the prey: so, arming themselves with whatever they could readily meet with, they made the best of their way to Brandon, but were too late; for the Monks were gone off, and had proceeded a considerable way down the river: they however marched by the side of the river and at length overtook them, but, not being provided with boats, could not come at them: so that after spending some time in vain threats and reproaches, till they were tired, and finding it to no purpose, they were forced to give over the pursuit, and return home again; leaving the Monks to continue the rest of their voyage without further molestation. They landed the same day about a mile from the Church, where they were received with great joy and triumph by all sorts of people, who came thither with the Monks and Clergy to meet them; and the body of *St. Withburga* being put into a hearse, was thence conveyed by land to Ely, and with solemn procession and singing praises to God, was deposited in the Church, next to St. Etheldreda, St. Sexburga, and St. Ermenilda. This memorable translation of St. Withburga's body from Derham to Ely, was on the eighth of July in the year of our Lord 974." The Monks at this time were spiritual virtuosos, and no action obtained more general commendation, than an ingenious and successful mode, practised by one Monastery for despoiling another Monastery of its favourite relic.

" For aid, since Saxons strive in vain to stem
 " The wrathful foe ? There is no safety now
 " In town or hamlet, pale and troubled forms 340
 " Meet us on every side, who mourn some friend
 " Or relative belov'd, untimely slain.
 " Over this goodly land dark tempests lower;
 " And heavy is the hand of God upon us."

" Thou speakest right," earnest, the Abbot cried; 345
 " The day is terrible to every man
 " That loves his country. In a few more years
 " No Saxon blood will flow, for these fierce Danes
 " Have made a league with Death. At early morn,
 " And noon, and when the hour of eve draws near, 350
 " Silent and shivering at the heart, we mark
 " The top of yon proud Tor,¹³ to see if flames
 " Rise ominous. And never lie we down
 " On nightly pillow, but, at sound, or heard,
 " Or fancied, we arise and cross our breasts, 355
 " And listen fearfully, then, sleep again,
 " Only to start more terrified. Young man!¹⁴
 " Thy wish is granted; here, contented live;
 " All that we have is thine, and when thou goest,
 " May peace go with thee!" 360

¹³ A high conical hill in the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, famous in after years, for having been the spot where Whiting the last Abbot was hung by order of Henry VIII. as mentioned in Note 5.

¹⁴ Alfred commenced his reign, at the age of twenty two. The time of his retiring into solitude, was about seven or eight years after.

BOOK III.

77

ALFRED look'd, and spake
 With wonted dignity, "Abbot! thy name?"
 But checking soon himself, he humbler spake.
 "I thank thee, Father! take a stranger's thanks,
 "His only gift." The holy man replied. 365
 "To aid the houseless wanderer, well befits
 "The christian that has learn'd to imitate¹⁵
 "His master, who about went doing good:
 "But, what the news you bring? Where are the Danes?
 "Cheer, if thou canst, for we are worn with fears." 370
 When ALFRED thus:

"No comforter am I,
 "It is a wintry night, and every house
 "And tree, with the white frost is cover'd o'er.
 "Prosperity may shine, but, in an hour 375
 "When low we lie, for feeble are our hopes,

¹⁴ Christianity was better understood, in this Island, in the eighth and ninth centuries, than it was some centuries afterward; many of the Ecclesiastics were distinguished for their piety and good sense. This may chiefly have arisen from the little influence which the Pope at this time had obtained over the English clergy. When Cuthbert, Bishop of Canterbury assembled a council of the Bishops and chief clergy of his province, in the year 747, to deliberate on the adoption of certain ecclesiastical regulations, Boniface, Archbishop of Mentz, sent them the resolutions of the council lately held in his Diocess, as a guide for themselves; in which the canon concerning the unity of the Church ran thus: "We have agreed in our synod to the confession of the catholic faith, and agree to continue in unity and subjection to the church of Rome; and desire to be subject to St. Peter, and his vicar, to the end of our lives, that we may be esteemed members of that church committed to St. Peter's care." The English canon however on the same subject did not even mention the Church or Bishop of Rome; being thus expressed: "Sincere love and christian unity and affection ought to be amongst all the clergy in the world, in deed and judgment, (without flattery of any one's person) as the servants of one Lord, and fellow-labourers in the same Gospel: so that however separated by the distance of place, they may notwithstanding be united in the same judgment, and serve God in one spirit; in the same faith, hope and charity; daily praying for each other, that every one may faithfully persevere to the end, in the discharge of his holy functions."

“ And very few, and a dark vale between:
“ If safety can be found, this spot is safe!
“ Therefore, good father! I my family
“ Will leave beneath thy roof, while to a place, 380
“ Distant, I hasten; but the hour draws on,
“ When with a lighter heart I may return.—
“ 'Tis hard to hope, yet harder to despair!

Throughout the hall, each to his neighbour spake,
As fancy prompted; but, at ALFRED's words, 385
The clamour died away, and all approach'd
Successive, to the place, and listen'd, still;
And when the King had ceas'd, the Abbot cried;

“ Fear not the enemy! his reign is short.
“ Know, gallant Stranger! God will prosper yet 390
“ Our Monarch ALFRED. He is wise and brave,
“ And all the hopes of Britain rest alone
“ On him and on high Heaven. Cheer then thy breast!
“ And if important calls require thee hence,
“ Go satisfied, that never mortal trust 395
“ This heart betrayed. Safe be thy treasure here,
“ And safe, tho' perilous, thy journey back!
“ My blessing shall go with thee.”

Words so kind—

This unexpected praise and flattering proof 400
Of unbought confidence, made the Queen's heart
Throb fast with gladness—as the King to earth
Look'd, whilst conflicting passions shook his frame;

Joy, sorrow, hope; fearing each eye might read
Upon his cheek his real character. 405
When thus he answer'd. "Sire! the faith thou hast
" In better days, inspires again my breast;
" And much thy words encourage me. I prize
" All blessings, but the blessing given by one—
" Like thee, a good man, brings a benefit 410
" In after times, as doth the genial shower
" Bathing the bud of Spring. Father! awhile
" I claim thy patience."

ALFRED then arose.

The Queen slow followed him, bearing her child, 415
Through where the Cloisters stood, and to the elms,
Far from obtruding ear. When thus he spake:

" ALSWITHA! dear art thou! but thrice more dear,
" For these thy sorrows: deem me not unkind,
" In leaving thee 'mid those who little know 420
" Thy worth, and thy hard fate; who never felt
" The social tie divine; who never knew
" A husband's struggles, or the bitter pang,
" At separation from that holiest friend—
" A dear loved wife. But thou hast that within 425
" Which buoys thy spirit; lifts thy soaring mind
" Above the power of circumstance; instructs
" Thy heart to view the shifting scenes of life,
" Smiling superior. Do I feign regret
" At leaving thee with strangers, far away 430
" From early friendships, kindred sympathies?

" It is most hard ! But we shall meet again !
 " Soon will my feet return, and I would hope
 " With tidings, such as thou wilt joy to learn ;
 " But, doubt whate'er thou wilt, oh, never doubt 435
 " The pang this parting gives; oh, never doubt
 " Thy husband's true affection."¹⁶

ALFRED turn'd

And wept. ALSWITHA mark'd the tear ! a tear
 That on her soul engraved a character,
 Deep, and for ever fresh. Sudden she strove 440
 To hide the anguish of her breast, and cried
 " My Lord why grieve'st thou ? I trust that sigh
 " Came not for me ! oh, do not grieve for me !
 " Beneath this roof, and with these pious men
 " I can live happily, and, tho' the sight 445
 " Of thee would yield me pleasure, yet, that sight—
 " I think I can resign full willingly,
 " And trust that, when thou seest it right, thy feet
 " Will hither turn, and thy heart join the heart
 " That is alone without thee. Cheer thee up, 450
 " And rest on Heaven, we shall do well again,

¹⁶ Asserius speaks very highly of the mutual affection which subsisted between Alfred and Alswitha. " The Anglo-Saxons were remarkable for the warmth of their affections to their family and relations. This they derived from their ancestors, the ancient Germans ; who not only admired and loved their women on account of their personal charms, but entertained a kind of religious veneration for them, and often consulted them as Oracles. Agreeably to this, we find that some of the Anglo-Saxon ladies were admitted into their most august assemblies, and great attention was paid to their opinions ; and so considerable was their influence in the most important affairs, that they were the chief instruments of introducing the Christian Religion into almost all the kingdoms of the heptarchy. Many of the Anglo-Saxon ladies of the highest rank were enrolled among their saints, and became the objects of the superstitious veneration of their countrymen. A great many laws were made to secure the rights, protect the persons, and defend the honor of the fair sex from all insults."

"Both thee and thine."

ALFRED, transported, cried,

"Thou best of women! soothing are thy words!
 "Thou dost not know how soothing! Trust in God;
 "And ere I go, let me behold thee smile;
 "For wherefore should'st thou grieve, and in thy mind
 "Cherish such hard forebodings? I must haste
 "To gather tidings, but, will soon return,
 "And we shall yet rejoice o'er perils past." 460

ALSWITHA thus. "I hear thy words, oh King!

"And I should think thee cheerful, but, thy face!
 "There is the myst'ry; there thou canst not hide
 "The conflict great within. Yet, it was kind,
 "Thus with soft stratagem, to strive to cheat 465
 "My heart of sorrow, but, 'tis vain! I see
 "Things as they are, and never more expect
 "Pleasure on earth. Now, hear me! If thou go,
 "Oh do not danger court, to prove thy strength,
 "Or skill, but, when thou seest it, turn off, 470
 "And think of me. Oh may no rivers wide
 "Obstruct thy course; no savage man approach
 "With dark designs! no wolf with hideous yell¹⁷

¹⁷ During the Heptarchy and for some centuries afterwards, wolves were very common in England. "King Edgar attempted to effect their extirpation, by commuting the punishment for certain crimes into the acceptance of a number of wolve's tongues from each criminal; and in Wales by converting the tax of gold and silver into an annual tribute of 300 wolve's heads. Notwithstanding these endeavours, his schemes proved abortive. Some centuries after the reign of the Saxon monarch, these animals increased to such a degree, as to become the object of royal attention: accordingly, Edward the first issued out his mandate to Peter Corbet, to superintend and assist in the destruction of wolves in the several counties of Glouces-

" Draw nigh thee ! May no bitter storms beat hard
 " Upon thy head ! and, at the hour of sleep, 475
 " May some propitious gale, the wither'd leaves
 " Blow near, and angels guard thee !"

ALFRED NOW

Beheld his blooming boy—whom thus he spake :
 " Mild infant ! thou canst lift thy hands in sport, 480
 " And laugh unconscious of the cares that press
 " Thy wretched parents ; but, the hour will come
 " When these light dreams shall vanish ; when thy heart
 " Shall sink within thee, and the passing clouds
 " Seem leagued against thy peace. Delighted child ! 485
 " Go on to smile, stretch out thy little arms
 " In nature's holiday, and chant thy song,
 " Untutor'd—heedless of thy coming wrongs :
 " But, they will soon o'ertake thee. Few and evil
 " Are man's appointed days, and such indeed 490
 " Thy Sire has found them. May a double share,
 " His, and thine own, have lain upon him ! Child !

ter, Worcester, Hereford, Salop and Stafford. In the adjacent county of Derby, certain persons held their lands as one condition, that they should destroy a given number of wolves, which greatly infested those parts. In Athelstan's reign, wolves so abounded in Yorkshire, that a retreat was built at Flixton in that county, *to defend passengers from the wolves, that they should not be devoured by them* ; and such ravages did these animals make during winter, that the Saxons distinguished the month of January by the name of *wolf month*." There is a spot in Cumberland, called Wotobank, a name which it received from the following circumstance : " A lord of Beckermont with his lady and servants were one time hunting the wolf : during the chase this lord missed his lady ; after a long and painful search, they, at last, to his inexpressible sorrow, found her body laying on this hill or bank, slain by the wolf, and the ravenous beast in the very act of tearing it to pieces, till frightened by the Dogs. In the transport of his grief, the first words which the sorrowful husband uttered, were, " *WOE TO THIS BANK,*" since vulgarly called *WOTOBANK,*" The last wolf in Scotland, was said to have been killed by Sir Ewin Cameron, in the year 1680.

“ Beloved child ! if thou should'st never more
“ Behold these eyes, nor at a riper age
“ Receive a Father's blessing, may high Heaven 495
“ Protect thee ! God of heaven and earth, look down
“ And save my child ! ALSWITHA ! now, farewell !”
She answered not ; and, as he moved away,
Sorrowing, his boy held out his little hands,
And changed from smiles to tears. “ Oh, fare thee well,”
Cried ALFRED, “ fare ye well !” Then toward the hall
With solemn step he walked.

The holy sire

A cordial had prepared for their return,
And hearty greetings, but, when he beheld 505
The King alone, he would have ask'd the cause,
And led him to the feast : But ALFRED cried,
“ My soul is full ! the sun is journeying on,
“ And I must leave thee ! Grateful is my heart
“ But it is full, and I can only say, 510
“ Protect my wife and child ! oh guard them safe !”
When through the lofty gateway slow he pass'd.

END OF BOOK III.

ALFRED. BOOK IV.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED arrives at an obscure cottage in the isle of Ethelney. His reception; burns the cakes; Ceolric, the Master, arrives with intelligence that Earl Oddune is surrounded by Hubba, in Kenwith-Castle, that Glastonbury-Abbey is destroyed by the Danes, and that all its inhabitants are murdered.

AH, who can tell the pangs which ALFRED felt,
Whilst wandering slow o'er wilds and desert wastes,
Joyless and pondering on the weight of ills
That now o'erwhelm'd him! what his mind endured,
Whose first of earthly hopes was to behold 5
His people happy; while his own great mind
Plann'd for their good, and nurs'd luxurious thoughts
Of high achievement. He beheld the world
And all the multitude of fellow men,
Not as an alien. He had learn'd to weigh 10
Which of the many miseries we mourn
To this our state was needful, which the effect
Of hostile innovation, and he thought
With fervent joy of all a King might do.
He long had fed on intellectual food : 15
The love of nature and her lofty scenes
Had harmonized his spirit, he had felt
His heart attuned to love.

At evening hour,
In the hot summer months, while yet a boy, 20
Oft would he wander by the slow-brook's side,
And mark its gentle noise, serving to break
The intensity of silence which oppress'd
His listening sense, and gave to all around
New and obscure solemnity. He felt 25
The beauty of all nature; sun and stars
To him spake audibly. He saw
Divinity in all things, and adored
The deepening mists of eve, the glorious morn,
The seasons, with their vast variety 30
Of unbought comforts, spreading out a feast
Oppressive with all good.

Whilst musing thus,
Oft he exclaim'd. "Whence came the monster, Pride?
" Didst thou, vain mortal! catch thy haughty mien 35
" From scenes like these, and fancy that the light
" Of the first morning beam'd alone on thee?
" For thee, the sky-lark sung, the breeze awoke
" Burden'd with fragrance, and around thy head
" Wanton'd in servile dalliance? Spirits vile 40
" May in the turmoil of this world, assault
" Oft-times our peace, but he who nature loves,
" And in the beauty of creation feels
" His heart immersed, will never stoop to mourn
" Inferior benefits. To feel within 45
" Capacities and pleasures pure and high,
" Unthought of by the vulgar, to survey

"The world's wide harmony, and to believe
"Its congregated forms for us were made;—
"Might curb the aspiring heart, methinks, that pants
"For transitory gaudes, and teach the worth,
"The proud pre-eminence of being man."
Then, with prophetic spirit he would cry
"Nor shall our race pass to the goal of time,
"Still hoping from futurity, the joys, 55
"Before within their grasp; the day shall come
"When evils and oppressions infinite
"Which we have borne, groaning beneath their weight,
"Our wiser sons shall hear of, as a tale,
"Discredited, that casts inglorious shade 60
"O'er their brave ancestors. The sun shall burst,
"Enthroned in brighter splendors, and survey
"Regenerated man, rising sublime
"From the wide sea of prejudice, the gulf
"Of stormy superstition, that consumes 65
"The fetter'd intellect, and sinks Heaven's work,
"First of material order, to the low
"And perishable insect of a day."

With thoughts like these, familiar had he grown.
From the young dawn of reason he had plann'd 70
(If e'er the hour arrived that gave a crown)
Big deeds, whose proud reality should scoff
Dull calculation, and to all display
What good the great might do. But royalty
Now came, and with it, cares, whose crushing weight

387

80

85

With light green leaf, rising from Winter's spoils,
Russet and grey, the gorse and fern were near,
And farther off, and far as he could see,
Blended with moss, and thorn, and sedgy grass,

With many a little plat of pasture fair,
 Opening between. ALFRED in thoughtful mood, 105
 Still onward sped, oppress'd with growing care,
 Save when the warbling tenants of the wild,
 Upstarting, gave to sad perplexity
 Short respite. Many a fitful glance he cast
 Of weary expectation o'er the heath, 110
 Which to him seem'd from each small eminence
 Wider to spread its dreary reign. The King
 Now languid grown, and lost amid the waste
 Of endless desolation,¹ felt his heart
 Prepared for death. He stood, and like the man 115
 That travels far, who calls his house and takes
 A parting leave, and with soft accent says,
 To some, perchance, who little kindness knew,
 "Farewell, my friends!" so ALFRED look'd around
 On all his mute companions—fern and heath, 120
 And half pronounced—"Farewell!"

When by his road
 Appear'd a figure stretch'd upon the earth,
 Of human shape. He hastened to the spot;

¹ I suppose Alfred to have lost himself on part of *Exmore*, which at that time extended much farther into Somersetshire than it does at present. Those who now inhabit the confines of Exmore, say, that a stranger, without a compass, who should attempt to wander across it, must almost inevitably perish: which arises from the peculiar form of this moor. It consists of a succession of hills and vallies in all directions, extending twenty miles. On ascending one hill, you perceive no prominent object, but as far as the eye can reach nothing but the summits of other hills of the same altitude, the approaches to which are barred by deep valleys, whilst the whole scene suggests the idea of barren and depopulated nature. Some readers may suppose that I have represented the danger of Alfred too great, of this however I am certain, that I have myself greatly suffered from the want of water, in traversing, during a hot season, these desolate regions. Exmore has always been famous for its breed of wild horses.

Trembling he saw!—It was old NIDOR, dead!— 125
The aged cripple! In one hand he held
His wallet empty, whilst beside him lay
A broken crutch. “Poor, miserable man!”
ALFRED exclaim’d, “had this my arm been near,
“Thou hadst not perish’d.” Silent he beheld, 130
Heaving the prayer to Heaven, then pass’d away,
Musing on that impenetrable vale
Which hides the future, screening many a gulf
From easy man, who unconcern’d looks on
To coming pleasures, when Death, unawares, 135
Sends him to dwell with blank forgetfulness.

Now sudden thoughts arose in ALFRED’S mind
Of those who never more might hear his fate.
He thought upon ALSWITHA, on his child—
His subjects, scatter’d o’er the ravaged land. 140
Far on his way he gazed, tho’ hopeless : sounds
And moving forms were none; it was a calm
So dead and so terrific that the world
Seem’d shadows, and all life extinct and gone.
When to his sight appear’d, of horses wild, 145
A drove, far in the distance, that approach’d,
And to a neighbouring dell rush’d down. The sight
Aroused the King from cares, and many thoughts
Corroding: hastening to the brow, what bliss
Swept through his bosom, when, beneath, he saw, 150
Catching the sun’s last radiance, a brook,
By whose green side the wild-hoof’d horses drank.

Fast down the slope he moved, and stay'd his thirst
At the pure spring. A sudden power, unknown,
Seem'd instant to pervade his frame; a power, 155
A spirit that infused new faculties : he view'd
With other eyes, and fear'd his tottering limbs
The winds would bear away, they were so light—
Reeling with joy, intoxicate. He look'd,
And saw the vale, the fair and woody vale, 160
Till then unmark'd, that round the barren hill
Spread its luxuriant verdure, and the stream,
Slow gliding on.

ALFRED beside the brook

Pass'd earnest, for the eve was drawing near, 165
And he had hoped, before another sun
Sank in the crimson west, to rest his head
Beneath some quiet dwelling; but, in vain,
For fast the shadows fell, and it was night.

The stream grew larger, by whose rushy side, 170
The King press'd on: but still no house appear'd.
"What means that light? he cried, as through the trees
It cast its vivid beam. He lost it now,
And now again it look'd more luminous.
"Ah cruel foe," he said, "tempt not my feet! 175
"Whether deceitful fire, or restless sprite,
"O'er moor and mountain fen, with giddy dance
"Luring to death the wilder'd traveller,
"Alike to me; here will I rest awhile,
"These reeds my pillow:" when the King lay down
And slept.

The morning sun magnificent
 Now rose, sending his winged harbingers,
 Mantled in glory, to illume new climes,
 And rouse new hearts, whilst Heaven's circumference
 Glow'd hotter as the Lord of Day advanced.
 Wide was the blaze; when ALFRED, starting up,
 Saw, glad of heart, a cottage, at the spot
 Where on the eve the doubtful light had shone.
 Slow he approach'd and knock'd,

190

A voice within,
 In shrill and fretful tone inquired the cause;
 When to the door a woman came and cried,
 "What led thee hither? man! whom seekest thou?"
 "I ask for bread" said ALFRED, "long these feet,
 "Weary, have toiled o'er neighbouring hill and moor;
 "Nor have I tasted aught of food, save here and there
 "Some scattered berries. Give thy servant bread,
 "And let him dwell awhile beneath thy roof:
 "What service in return these hands can do,
 "Shall be well done and cheerfully."

200

When thus

The angry woman. "Ill can I provide
 "For others' wants, yet as a homeless man
 "I must not spurn thee. Here shalt thou remain 205
 "Two only days;² we cannot feed thee more,

² Alfred having divided the inhabitants into tithings, hundreds, &c. (as stated in Note 5, Book 2,) ordained that every free-man should belong to some tithing, and in order that this regulation might not be violated, enacted a law by which all persons were prevented, under severe penalties, from entertaining a stranger more than *two days*. This law, amongst the Saxons, when the intercourse between different parts of the country was very limited, produced many advantages, although it might not be applicable to a more improved state of society.

"For ACCA and CEOLRIC earn with toil

"Their daily bread."

"Hast thou no constant work

"For one who well will serve thee?" "none," she cried.

"But what canst thou perform? canst fell a tree?

"Or build a hut, or shed? or shape the thong?"³

"Neither," the King replied, "but I have heart

"And will to serve thee in what way I can."

"But what way is't?" said ACCA, "canst thou sow?

"Or reap? or milk the kine? or use the spade?"

"Oh, no," replied the King, "but I can learn."

Said ACCA, "learn!—thou art a helpless drone,

"Where hast thou lived? canst spin? or shear the sheep?

"Or mend the fishing-net? canst carry wood?" 220

"Aye that I *can* do," cried the King, with joy;

"For I have strength enough." "Well, take thy food,"

Said ACCA, "enter in, and mind my words,

"Whate'er I tell thee."

Many days had pass'd 223

In this new dwelling, and a nobler pile

Of turf or stubble, never from the fields

Was borne by mortal man, than ALFRED bore.

And often in the woods, from tree to tree

He climb'd, to gain some limb, whose tempting shape

Half form'd the bow; for, to his ardent eye,

It seem'd to court attention, and to plead,

³ Before the discovery of flax and hemp, thongs or strips of skin were used instead of cord. This even extended to the rigging of ships, whose ropes and cables were made of thongs. The Danes commonly used the skin of the whale for this purpose.

Almost, for power to hurl the missile dart
Fierce on the Danes.

The Monarch's restless mind
Yet ill could brook the low employments claim'd
From servitude; his busy fancy ran
O'er coming years; his faithful subjects' wrongs,
And on the means best suited to support
A tottering crown. ACCA perceiv'd full oft 240
The wayward man pursuing fancies wild,
Regardless of the charge of household sort
Committed to him. Often, bitter words
She heaped, and hard reproaches, till at length
Her voice grew louder, when, the cottage door 245
Burst open, and the master entered in,—

CEOLRIC.

“Wife! what moves thy wrath?” he cried.
“Whom hast thou 'neath our roof? I know him not,”
When, turning to the King, he viewed him well. 250
ACCA replied, “It is a friendless man
“Who sought our dwelling, and petition'd hard,
“For food and service, in thy absence; I,
“Too readily o'ercome by pity, stood
“And heard his tale; who having promised fair 255
“To do the servant's office, him I took,
“But never came within a door, a man
“More thoughtless, or perversely bent on dreams
“Bewilder'd. Many an hour he sits and hums
“About old CÆDMAN,⁴ and then stops and frowns

⁴ An old Saxon Poet, to whose writings Alfred was greatly attached. “Though the Eng-

" At something in the air; then rises up,
 " And walks with stately mien, then sits again,
 " And shaves his bow, or with more furious eye,
 " Gazes in vacancy. In truth, I think
 " The man half mad, for not an hour ago, 265
 " The household cakes thou seest yonder, burnt
 " And smoking on the hearth, I to him gave,
 " And with strict charge, and caution often told,
 " Warn'd him to turn, and with due care preserve
 " From scorching heat; when to the fields I sped, 270
 " And, after certain time return'd. With joy

lish began to apply to learning in the former part of the seventh century, yet it was near the conclusion of it before any of them acquired much literary fame. ALDHELM, a near relation, if not the nephew of Ina, king of the West-Saxons, was the first who did so. Having received the first part of his education in the school which one Macdulf, a learned Scot, had set up in the place where Malmsbury now stands, he travelled into France and Italy for his improvement. At his return, he studied some time under Adrian, Abbot of St. Augustine's in Canterbury, the most learned professor of the sciences who had ever been in England. In these different seminaries, he acquired a very uncommon stock of knowledge, and became famous for his learning, not only in England, but in foreign countries; whence several learned men sent him their writings for his perusal and correction; particularly prince Arcivil, a son of the king of Scotland, who wrote many pieces, which he sent to Aldhelm, "intreating him to give them their last polish by rubbing off their Scotch rust." He was the first Englishman who wrote in the Latin language, both in prose and verse, and composed a book for the instruction of his countrymen in the prosody of that language. Besides this, he wrote several other treatises on different subjects, some of which are lost, and others published by Martin, Delrieu and Canisius. Venerable Bede who flourished in the end of this, and beginning of the next century gives the following character of Aldhelm. "He was a man of universal erudition, having an elegant style, and being wonderfully well acquainted with books, both on philosophical and religious subjects." Alfred used to say that Aldhelm was the best of all the Saxon Poets, and that a favorite song, which was universally sung in his time, near two hundred years after its author's death, was of his composition. When he was Abbot of Malmsbury, having a fine voice and great skill in music as well as poetry, and observing the backwardness of his barbarous countrymen, to listen to grave instructions, he composed a number of little poems, which he sang to them after mass in the sweetest manner, by which they were gradually instructed and civilized. After this excellent man had governed the Monastery of Malmsbury, of which he was the founder, about thirty years, he was made bishop of Sherborne, where he died, A. D. 709."

" The door I opened—as I look'd around,
 " There on his wicker chair he sat, his eyes
 " Fix'd on the floor, his knife beside, while near
 " Lay many a half form'd bow. But, sad to tell! 275
 " My cakes, for thy return, prepared to shew
 " A wife's affection, lay involved in smoke!
 " Burnt to a coal! and this great loon at hand,
 " Unmindful. Dost thou hear?" she cried,
 And stamp'd her foot, and, with indignant ire, 280
 Vow'd oft and bitterly, no other food
 His lips should touch, till he had eaten all
 The black-burnt cakes.⁵

CEOLRIC thus replied:

" Heed not the cakes: the young man has the look
 " Of honesty, and soon will mend. But, wife!
 " Hast heard the news?" "The news! what news?" she cried.
 " News that will make thee mourn," CEOLRIC said.
 " Why, Glastonbury!" "Glastonbury!" cried
 ALFRED uprising, " what of that?" " pray mind 290
 " Thy work," said ACCA, "mind thy work, young man.
 " But what of Glastonbury? husband!" Slow
 He spake. " The Danes have forced it, and have made

5 " Alfred seeing his subjects fly, the enemy in the midst of his country, and no means left either to unite or solicit the few that were remained unto him, being forced to give way unto the rage of fortune, lays aside all kingly state and shew of being a prince, disposes of his family according to present necessity, and taking the disguise of a country clown, hires himself as a servant to a neatherd. The neatherd's wife being busied one day in going to the oven with bread, and having set some cakes thereof before the fire, told the king to remember and turn them, whilst she went about her other business. Alfred being busy in trimming of his bow and arrows, and fitting his other weapons, the cakes began to burn without his observing it, till the rude housewife coming in, scolded him aloud and said, that though he would not turn them, he would be glad enough to eat them."

"That comely pile a ruin!"⁶ ACCA turned
 To ALFRED near, and said, "Why sighest thou? 295
 "But husband! speak thee on."

"That noble pile
 "Is now in ashes! all the pious Monks
 "Have there been murdered! scarce one stone remains,
 "And fast the Danes march on, and devastate
 "With undistinguished fury. Now I see
 "The end of Britain coming, 'tis an hour
 "That tries the strongest heart, and makes us know
 "What terror means. So seldom do I meet
 "A Saxon, that in truth, it is a sight
 "That does me good. Come, cheer thee up, young man!
 "No doubt, with us, and all of english blood,
 "Thou, too, hast suffer'd from these Danes, that spare
 "Nor age nor sex: awhile forget thy cares,
 "And let me see thee glad, for when the foe
 "Thus wage their warfare, Saxon should behold
 "A brother's face in Saxon.

"Yester eve
 "I met a man fast flying from the west,
 "O'er yonder hill: he told me many a tale
 "Of danish wrath, and danish cruelty,
 "But one that made my big heart leap again.
 "Thou'st heard of ODDUNE? that brave general!

⁶ The Danes bore the Monks a peculiar animosity, uniformly destroying all the monasteries and religious houses they could find, and exercising in other respects the most unheard-of cruelties. INGULFUS gives the following account of the destruction of CROYLAND ABBEY by the Danes. "The winter being ended, the Danes took shipping and went into Lindisse in Lincolnshire, and landing at Humberstan, spoiled all that country, at which time the famous

(ALFRED look'd up) " a braver man ne'er met
 " Upon the field of fight, and measured swords, 320
 " Or cast the lance or dart. He lately came
 " Down to the west, to seek his fortunes there,

and ancient monastery of Bardney was destroyed, the monks and all others being massacred in the church without mercy; and when they had staid there all summer, wasting the country, they at last came into Kesteven, in the same province, where they committed the like murders and desolations. Upon which Count Algar drew together all the youth of Holland, with two knights his seneschals, called Wibert and Leofric, who marched at the head of them, together with a brave body of 200 men, belonging to Croyland Abbey, who being all stout lusty fellows, were led by one Toly, then a monk, but formerly a famous soldier among the Mercians. These taking with them about 300 stout and warlike men more from Deping, Lantoft, and Boston, (to whom also joined Morchor, lord of Brunne, with his strong and numerous family) and being met by the sheriff of Lincoln, (a valiant and ancient soldier) with the Lincolnshire forces, they mustered together in Kesteven on St. Maurice's day, gave the Pagans battle, vanquished them, with the slaughter of three of their chiefs, and a great number of common soldiers, and afterwards pursued them to their very camp, where finding a stout resistance, night at last parted them, and the earl drew back his army. But it seems the same night there returned to the Danish camp all the rest of the princes of that nation, who dividing the country among them, had marched out to plunder. Their names are barbarous, and too many to be all particularly mentioned, but the chief leaders amongst them were Hinguar (Ivar) and Hubba, Godrum and Basseg, with others, who then came, very seasonably, with great forces, a multitude of captives, and a great deal of spoil. Their return being known, the greatest part of the christians struck with terror fled away; whilst those that were left, early in the morning, after hearing divine service, and receiving the sacrament, being resolved to die for Christ, and in defence of their country, marched into the field against their enemies; but the earl, perceiving his forces to be too much weakened, appointed fryer Toly with his five hundred men to fight in the right wing, because they were the strongest; and earl Morchar with those that followed him, as also the sheriff of Lincoln, making other five hundred men, in the left wing; resolving himself, with his seneschals, to keep the main body, as being most convenient for assisting either wing if there were occasion. The Danes being now exasperated at the slaughter of their men, (having buried their three chiefs at a place then called Laundon, but afterwards from this burial Trekyngham) two of their chiefs and eight counts marched out, whilst the rest guarded the camp and captives. But the Christians, because of the smallness of their number, drawing themselves up in one body, made with their shields a strong testudo against the force of their enemies' arrows, and kept off the horse with their pikes. And thus, being well ordered by their commanders, they kept their ground all day; but night coming on, notwithstanding till then they had remained unbroken, and had withstood the force of their enemies' arrows, whose horses being tired began to flag; yet they very imprudently left an intire victory to the Pagans. For they feigning a flight on purpose, seemed to quit the field; which the Christians had no sooner perceived, however their commanders forbid and opposed it, than they broke their ranks, and were all dispersed through the plain

" And serve his country. Many a fearless youth
 " Him follow'd to the war, 'till soon he saw
 " A hopeful band of warriors bold and true, 325
 " Aiding his cause ; but, Acca ! mark me well ;

without any order or command. So that the Pagans returning like lions upon a flock of sheep, made a most prodigious slaughter amongst them ; whilst the stout count Algar, and fryer Toly, with some soldiers, getting upon a rising ground, and being drawn up into a round body, did for a long time endure their insults, till at last the said earl and other captains, seeing the stoutest men of their small army slain, got upon the thickest heaps of the Christians' dead bodies, and, being resolved to sell their lives as dear as they could, after having received many wounds, died honourably in the field. There now only remained a few young men of Sutton and Gedeney ; but these flinging away their arms, fled into a neighbouring wood, and by that means escaping came the night following to the monastery of Croyland, where they related the slaughter of the Christians, and the loss of their whole company : which when they had told at the church door with great lamentations, the Abbot and Monks, being extremely confounded at this ill news, resolved to keep with them only the elder Monks, and some few small children to provoke compassion, and so sent away all the younger men, together with the reliques, jewels, and charters of their Monastery, by boat to the wood of Ancaryg, adjoining to their Island ; where they staid with one Toret an anchorite four days, being thirty in number, whereof ten were priests. But the Abbot with the rest of his brethren, (after they had hid the rest of the plate, with the rich table of the altar) expecting nothing less than to be made a sacrifice to the fury of the enemy, put on their sacred vestments, said mass and communicated ; which they had scarce finished, when the Pagans breaking into the church, slew Abbot Theodore at the altar, who perished by the hands of their chief Osketule. After which they proceeded to dispatch the rest, which they did in so butcherly a manner, that there was not of old or young any that escaped, except one handsome boy of about ten years old, who (being intended for a Monk) was saved by count Sidroc the younger, who stripped him of his habit, put on him a Danish coat, and ordered him to follow him wherever he went. When they had made an end of the slaughter, they broke open the tombs of St. Guthlac, and the princes there buried ; but finding a far more inconsiderable plunder than they expected, they set the church on fire, and burnt the dead bodies that were in it together. Four days after the destruction of Croyland, the Danes marched towards the Monastery of Medeshamsted, since called Peterborough, where finding the gate locked, they began to make an assault upon it : but receiving a repulse, at the second assault Tulba the brother of Hubba was knocked down with a stone and carried off dead ; whereat Hubba was so enraged, that breaking into the Monastery he slew all the Monks that came in his way, whilst the rest of them destroyed the others, till at last all perished. So that, in short, the Monastery and the Church with the Charters belonging to them were wholly destroyed, together with a noble library of books which was reduced to ashes. When they had continued here the space of four days, they got together all the spoil they could and marched towards Huntingdon ; but in their way thither, as the two counts Sidrocs brought up the rear of their army, which had now passed the river Nene, two waggon loads of rich moveables happened to be sunk in the ford, as also the beasts that drew them, in getting out of which whilst the younger Sidroc and his men were busied,

- " Scarce had he rais'd this gallant troop, and fired
 " Their breasts with ardor, when the scathing news,
 " That HUBBA came that way, spread through the camp.
 " In this distracting hour, short time was left 330
 " For consultation, and they instant march'd
 " To Kenwith's neighbouring castle⁷; there they are
 " Hemm'd in, and trusting to their God alone,
 " And their own valour. Lofty is the pile;
 " Firm built and massy, and a better man 335

the boy Turgar slipt away into the next wood, and walking all night, about break of day he got to Croyland, where he found the Monks returned again, and very active in quenching the fire as well as they could; to whom he related all that had happened, and discovering where the body of the Abbot and most of the Monks lay, they removed the rubbish, and buried them. This done, they first chose Godric, one of the Monks that escaped, for Abbot, and then resolved to go, and do the like pious office for the late Prior and Monks of Medeshamsted; where arriving, they buried the bodies of about fourscore Monks in one grave in the church-yard, placing over them a pyramidal stone of about a yard high; whereon were carved the images of the Abbot and Monks about him, which were to be seen in the time of Ingulfus. In the mean time the Danes spoiling the country as far as Grant-bridge (now Cambridge) they then fell upon, and burnt the famous Nunnery of Ely, killing all that were therein, both men and women."

7 Kenwith, to which Oddune retreated, was situated at the mouth of the river Taw, in Devonshire, but of which (Camden says) no vestige at present remains. The Saxon castles generally consisted of two parts, a bass-court, and a keep or dungeon. "The bass-court was a piece of ground, sometimes about an acre in extent, surrounded by a high and thick stone wall, with a garretted parapet upon the top, from whence the garrison discharged their weapons on the assailants. This wall had also many small windows or rather slits in it, very narrow in proportion to their height, through which they shot their arrows. The lodgings for the officers and soldiers were built in the area, and along the inside of the wall. At one end of the bass-court, was a round mount, sometimes artificial, sometimes natural, on which the keep or dungeon stood, which was a circular, stone building, with thick and high walls. From the top of this building, which was flat, the garrison had an extensive prospect of the surrounding country, being able by that means to discover the approaches of their enemies; from thence also the chief defence was made. The body of the keep, which sometimes consisted of several stories, contained the lodgings of the commander of the castle; and in the bottom was the dungeon (from which the building took its name) under ground and without light. Though these castles may appear to us ill calculated for a long and severe defence, yet as the art of fortification and attack improve and decay together, they answered every purpose which that age could require."

“ To bid defiance, never javelin hurl’d
 “ From battlement or tower. A noble Thane !^s
 “ God prosper him, and send him quick relief !”

§ Among the Saxons, society was divided into five classes, SLAVES, FRILAZINS, CEORLS, THANES, and PRINCES OF THE BLOOD. The lowest order of people among the Anglo-Saxons was Slaves, who with their wives and children were the property of their masters. Besides those who were native Slaves, or Slaves by birth, others frequently fell into this wretched state, by various means ; as, by an ill luck at play, by the fate of war, by forfeiting their freedom by their crimes, or by even contracting debts which they were unable to pay. These unhappy people, who were very numerous, formed an article both of internal and foreign trade. “ The exportation of Slaves from some parts of England continued to the time of the Norman conquest. The people of BRISTOL were much addicted to this ignominious branch of commerce ; of which we have the following curious account in the life of Wulfstan, bishop of Worcester, in the reign of William the first. “ There is a sea-port town called Bristol, opposite to Ireland, unto which its inhabitants make frequent voyages on account of trade. Wulfstan cured the people of this town of a most odious and inveterate custom, which they derived from their ancestors, of buying men and women in all parts of England, and exporting them to Ireland for the sake of gain. You might have seen, with sorrow, long ranks of both sexes, and of the greatest beauty tied together with ropes, and daily exposed to sale : nor were these men ashamed, oh horrible wickedness ! to give up their nearest relations, nay their own children to slavery ! Wulfstan knowing the obstinacy of these people, sometimes stayed two months amongst them, preaching every Lord’s day ; by which, in process of time, he made so great an impression on their minds, that they abandoned their wicked trade, and set an example to all the rest of England to do the same.” It was the sight of some English Slaves which was the occasion of christianity being first preached among their countrymen. “ Pope Gregory the great, beholding some English youths exposed for sale in the market place at Rome, was so much struck with the beauty of their persons, that when he was told that they were named English (Anglos) and that they and their countrymen were not yet converted to Christianity he broke out into this exclamation : “ How lamentable is it that the prince of darkness should have such beautiful subjects, and that a nation so amiable in their bodies, should have none of the charms of divine grace in their souls. Their form is truly angelic, and they are fit to be the companions of the angels in Heaven.” In consequence of this, St. Augustine was sent to England, and succeeded in converting several kings of the heptarchy, from which time the traffic of slaves gradually declined, the bishops and clergy recommending the manumission of Slaves as a most charitable and meritorious action. The second class or rank of people was called FRILAZINS ; who had been slaves, but had either purchased, or by some other means obtained their liberty. The third class or rank of people in Britain were called CEORLS, who descended from a long race of Freemen, and constituted a middle class, between the Labourers and Mechanics (who were generally Slaves, or descended from Slaves) on the one hand, and the Nobility on the other. They might go where they pleased, and pursue any way of life that was most agreeable to them ; but so many of them applied to agriculture and farming the lands of the Nobility, that a Ceorl was the most common name for a husbandman. A Ceorl by possessing five hides of land, or if he applied to learning and obtained priests’ orders, was considered as a Thane. When he applied to trade and made three voyages beyond

" But who are they," cried ACCA, 'with a look
 Of terror, " who the Abbey walls have razed ? 340
 " Are they the same, who now, with threats, surround
 " Earl ODDUNE? " no," CEOLRIC said, " there are
 " Two armies westward. One whom HUBBA leads,
 " And one by GUTHRUM. From the ruin'd walls
 " Of Glastonbury, swift the latter hies 345
 " To join proud HUBBA, scattering far and wide
 " Death and destruction."

" If he take that course,"
 Said ACCA, trembling, " think of thy good sire !
 " Of his big perils! what will now become, 350
 " Of poor old NIDOR?" then CEOLRIC sigh'd,
 And said, " My aged father! God, I hope
 " Will screen thy wither'd limbs. Afflicted sire!
 " I trust thy cot no Danes may find! My heart
 " Sinks fast within me when I think of thee— 355
 " My poor old father!" (ALFRED started up,
 But check'd himself, and to his seat, again
 Return'd) " and our two sons, who, with one heart,

sea, in a ship of his own, he was also advanced to the dignity of Thane. (a law of Alfred's). If a Ceorl also applied to arms, and acquitted himself so well as to obtain from his patron, either five hides of land or a gilt sword, helmet and breastplate, as the reward of his valour, he was likewise considered as a Thane. Thus the temple of honour stood open to the Ceorls, whether they applied themselves to agriculture, commerce, letters, or arms, which were then the only professions esteemed worthy of a Free-man. The fourth class was that of THANES or Nobles. There were several orders of Nobility or Thanes, among the Anglo-Saxons, though it is difficult to mark at this time the precise distinction between them. There were however three orders of King's Thanes, who consisted of the hereditary Nobility, who were attendants upon, and retainers of the King: the great ornaments of his court in time of peace, and the chief defence of his person in time of war. Of this class Oddune was an illustrious member. The fifth and last order, consisted of those who were related to the Royal Family, and were called PRINCES OF THE BLOOD.

" Follow our Monarch ALFRED, whom we sent,
" No labour'd task, to join his fortunes; they 360
" Poor youths! are gone, and little do we know
" How hard they fare."

Said ACCA, " What an hour
" We live in, and what dangers stalk around,
" Our dwelling. Weary is my head with hope; 365
" And fears successive revel in my breast,
" And fast consume my spirit. I am sick;
" I have all cause for care, yet, every hour
" Makes me more callous; I shall soon become
" Heedless of all things, for my heart seems chang'd:
" I would, but cannot feel! Thy aged sire,
" Whom I so used to love, is now no more
" Than tale forgotten; nay, I almost doubt
" My recollection; never could this mind
" Have known such full affection for those youths, 375
" And that old man."

CEOLRIC thus: " My wife!
" It is a bitter time for thee and me,
" But what are our dismays, compared with his—
" Our good King ALFRED? think what he endures,
" That injured Prince! the noblest, best of men!
" His heart is tender, and he calls his own,
" All virtues and all trials. Think of *him*,
" Driven from his father's throne, and forced to see
" Himself to death devoted, and his Queen, 385
" And infant child, houseless and wanting bread:
" Think of thy Prince!"

" At these thy words, I feel
 " My spirit calm," cried ACCA. " Where is now
 " Our good and valiant King? have tidings reach'd 390
 " Thine ear since last we parted? for I long
 " To know his welfare." " Nothing have I learnt,"
 Replied the Neat-herd. " Heartless now he roams
 " With a few faithful followers, 'mid woods
 " And secret combs, and in the holes of rocks, 395
 " Far from all human dwelling. 'Tis a joy,
 " For thee and me, that at this trying time
 " Our sons are with him, and a bolder pair
 " Of rustic Saxons, live not to oppose
 " The robber Danes." " Now is it time to rest," 400
 ACCA replied, " for fast the sun declines,
 " And tho' we fail to sleep, 'tis well to court
 " That friend of every sorrow. To thy room!"
 Loud, to the King she spake. He heard, when all
 Pass'd to their reeden beds.⁹ 405

But ALFRED's eye
 No slumber visited. He watch'd the moon,
 And counted o'er the brightest of the stars

⁹ The ancient Britons slept on skins, and lay on the floor of their apartments: Skins among the Anglo-Saxons, were changed for rushes; which formed the beds of many of the lower orders of Welsh to the last century: the Highlanders, for the most part sleep on them at present. For many ages the beds of the French and Italians were constantly composed of straw, and amongst the Anglo-Saxons this was considered as a kind of luxury, and confined to gentry only, the common people uniformly lying on rushes. Some ingenious man, " of unrecorded name," many years afterwards invented the bedstead, or the art of supporting the bed on four pedestals, but this improvement is said to have been entirely unknown to our Saxon forefathers. Straw was used in the royal chamber of England as late as the conclusion of the thirteenth century; and it was the office of the *Chamberlain* in the court of the Welsh Kings, " To provide clean straw or rushes for the royal bed."

That shone in heaven, and strove to dissipate
 The fix'd and gnawing load that on his heart 410
 Press'd hard ; but it was vain : his woes sprang up,
 Pre-eminent, and dared his will, and bore
 A master's sway—ruling his passive mind.
 His faithful ODDUNE, leaguer'd round, and now
 No force to aid him. Of ALSWITHA slain— 415
 For ever gone ; and of his infant son,
 Toss'd on the hostile spear,¹⁰ whose piercing cries
 No father's arm could succour. “ ’Tis the hour
 “ Of vengeance!” cried the King. “ My kindling breast
 “ Glows with one purpose ! By the Eternal God, 420
 “ Now am I roused ! The danish cup is full !
 “ The incense of their crimes hath steam'd to heaven,
 “ And God demands my vengeance.” Many plans
 All deadly, to and fro, through ALFRED's mind
 Pass'd rapid ; till, at length, a heavy sleep 425
 Fell on him, and his dreams were mixed with blood.

¹⁰ “ The Danes, like inhuman savages, destroyed all before them with fire and sword, involving cities, towns and villages in devouring flames ; and cutting those in pieces with their battle axes who attempted to escape from their burning houses. The tears, cries and lamentations of men, women and children, made no impression on their unrelenting hearts ; even the most tempting bribes, and the humblest offers of becoming their slaves had no effect. All the towns through which they passed, exhibited the most deplorable scenes of misery and desolation ; venerable matrons and old men lying with their throats cut before their own doors, and the streets covered with the bodies of their children, without legs, heads, or arms.”

ALFRED. BOOK V.

ARGUMENT.

SIGBERT, in search of Alfred, arrives at the cottage with a child which he found on the neighbouring beach, by the side of a murdered Monk; Alfred perceives it to be his own; is upbraided by Sigbert for not joining to oppose the Danes. The King discovers himself; dismisses Sigbert to gain some tidings of the fate of Alswitha, sends the Neatherd on a mission to Kenwith Castle, and after entrusting his child with Acca, departs to join his troops in Selwood Forest.

AT the first gleam of dawn, the King arose.
The morning light came slow, and gathering clouds,
Still heap'd on clouds, spread through the concave dark:
Now borne away by the quick hurrying winds,
That only brought fresh clouds, of deeper dye, 5
And more portentous shadows. ALFRED gazed
O'er all the scene. It was an hour of sadness!
The fields were grey; the brambles and the trees
Mute and unmusical; for, not a voice,
Save of the rook, was heard, that, sailing fast 10
On the loud tempest, caw'd a hideous caw,
Then passed away; whilst on the neighbouring stones
And leaves, the rain beat in such harrowing sounds,
That to the King it seem'd the constant hiss
Of jarring serpents. 15

ALFRED now retired
To contemplate a scene more desolate,—

His mind. A purpose fix'd was there, but when
 To execute, unknown. He rose, and 'mid
 The undetermined conflict, once again 20
 Performed the servant's task.

It was the time
 When the first meal began. CEOLRIC sat
 By the clean hearth,¹ and, gazing at the sky,
 To ACCA said, "It is a stormy morn, 25
 "And fast the rain descends! how sad to roam
 "At such an hour, o'er the drear wilderness
 "That bosoms our low cot. It gives me cheer
 "To think that I have pass'd its confines, now,
 "I view the surly storm, that but endears 30
 "Domestic comfort."

Scarce had he declared,
 When to the door there came a warrior man,
 Clad in bright armour. In his hands he held
 A child, dripping with rain. He entered in, 35
 Whilst strange astonishment the master fill'd,
 And ACCA wondered, silent.

"Here I am,
 "Thank God" said SIGBERT. (For it was the monk
 Who, on a former day, the King had sought, 40
 And told his wrongs.) ALFRED approach'd the child;
 It was his own! grateful he look'd to Heaven,
 And with ejaculation, mute, retired.

¹ The Hearth of the Anglo-Saxons was always placed in the centre of the room, and it can hardly be supposed that the Saxons enjoyed the benefit of a chimney, when it was unknown to the Romans in the zenith of their luxury; the smoke, however, from wood, is less unpleasant and detrimental to health, than the sulphureous effluvia from coal. No coal has been discovered in Italy to the present time.

CEOLRIC then the armed man addressed.

"What seek'st thou here? good warrior! we are poor;

"Yet, what thou needest, thou shalt have, and that²

"Right willingly." "But wherefore this young babe

"So wet and dripping." ACCA cried, and asked

To warm his hands, and give some needful food.

"But wherefore didst thou bring," again she cried, 50

"This infant in so rude an hour, 'mid rain

"And the loud tempest?" As she took the child

And press'd him to her bosom.

"I have long,"

Said SIGBERT, "been in search of our good King, 55

"Whom God preserve! but nothing can I learn;

"He wanders now o'er moors, or hides himself

"In clefts of rocks, far from all human search.

"I fear me bitterly, some savage beast³

² The Anglo-Saxons were remarkable for their hospitality: this disposition was greatly increased after their conversion to christianity, in consequence of being strengthened by religious motives. "The Anglo Saxon clergy were commanded by the canons of the church to practice hospitality themselves, and to recommend the practice of it very frequently and earnestly to the people. The English Kings spent a considerable portion of their revenues in entertaining strangers, and their own nobility and clergy; particularly at the three great festivals, of Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide. The English Nobility, in imitation of their Princes, consumed the greatest part of their large estates in a rude abundant kind of hospitality, of which all who thought proper were welcome to partake; while the inferior classes of society, to the extent of their power, were always courteous and hospitable to strangers."

³ The forests of Britain, at this period, contained a great many wolves, wild boars, and bears, besides wild bulls and cows, which were all milk white, with thick hanging manes, like lions, and almost as fierce and savage as they. The wild boar remained in England many years after the wolf was extirpated; and the bear was common here down even to the conquest. "When any one," says the penitentials of Egbert, strikes a wild beast with an arrow, and it escapes and is found dead three days afterwards; if a hound, a wolf, a fox, or a bear, or any other wild beast hath begun to feed upon it, let no christian touch it." "The town of Norwich," says the dooms-day book, "furnished annually one bear to the King, and six dogs for baiting it."

"Hath harm'd our monarch; for on yonder heath 60

"I found his well-known mantle; see it here!"

He then display'd the cloak that on the earth

ALFRED himself had cast. The chief again:

"It is not smear'd with blood, yet how his garb

"Should rest upon the ground in such a place, 65

"I cannot tell. If, by high Heaven ordain'd,

"Evil hath lighted on our King, what fate

"Then waits for Saxons, sunk, dispirited,

"It were not hard to tell." "Oh woeful thought,

Cried ACCA, "ALFRED has all prayers, his sword 70

"Next after God, we trust in; but declare

"How came'st thou by this child? this lovely child,

"That smiles on all, diverted, and looks up

"With such calm sweetness?"

SIGBERT thus replied:

"Whilst wandering o'er yon heath, in toilsome search

"Of ALFRED, our good King; a piteous cry

"Pierced through my ears: looking, I near espied

"A murdered monk, (for whom no bell hath toll'd)⁴

"And underneath his cloak this infant boy. 80

⁴ Bells were introduced into Britain as early as the seventh century, and were ever afterwards considered as a necessary appendage to every parish church. "The passing bell was anciently rung for two purposes, one to bespeak the prayers of all good Christians for a soul just departing; the other to drive away the evil spirits who stood at the bed's foot, and about the house ready to seize their prey, or at least to molest and terrify the soul in its passage: but by the sound of the bell, they were kept aloof, and the soul, like a hunted hare, gained the start. Hence, perhaps, exclusive of the additional labour, was the high price demanded for tolling the greatest bell of the church; for, that being louder, the evil spirit must go further off, to be clear of its sound, by which the poor soul got so much the more start of them." Bells, in the times of popery, were regularly baptized, anointed, christened and exorcised by the Bishop.

" He was grown pale with fasting, and his cheek
" Still wet with tears. His little arms he stretch'd,
" At sight of me; and, tho' I was alone,
" I could as soon have lain mine own head down,
" And died, as left this babe. I instant stoop'd, 85
" Rais'd him in haste, and to my bosom warm,
" Press'd his cold limbs, and soon he look'd, and smiled.
" Thou helpless babe! thus orphan'd, I will joy
" To be thy foster-father; thou shalt live
" Henceforth with me, if Heaven should spare my life."

When Acca broke the silence. " Warrior bold,
" I cannot stand and ponder, I must speak,
" And praise thee for thy goodness, thus to aid
" A wretched infant, and, 'mid storms like these,
" Conduct him to our cot. It was most brave! 95
" I love thee for it, and if wealth were mine,
" Or honours, thou should'st be the noblest man
" In Christendom, aye, and the wealthiest, too."

Replied the warrior. " Woeful was the sight
" Of the dead man upon the heath; so foul 100
" The look of death, I never saw: his limbs!
" And then his head! I could not trust mine eye,
" For, when I saw the child, I started back,
" And thought that life could never sojourn near
" A scene so horrible." 105

Then ALFRED said,
From the far corner where he listening stood,

“ Was there no mother near ?” When thus exclaim’d
The haughty chieftain. “ What is that to thee?
“ Regard thy work, young man ! holding thy peace:
“ It suits thee to be silent.” When he turn’d
To ACCA and CEOLRIC, and thus said :
“ Why keep you here a man so stout of limb,
“ In this your dwelling ? he had better far
“ Have been in battle, fighting for his King. 115
“ Had every man like him, once started up
“ At sound of danger, and in concert join’d
“ To meet our furious enemies and check
“ Their progress ; how should we have leap’d
“ To see their carcasses mangled and bare 120
“ Courting the raven’s beak ; but, dastard minds,
“ Like his, have shrunk from danger, and exposed
“ Our valiant Prince, and Country, to the Danes,
“ And their fierce ravage. Instant flee, to join
“ Some band of Saxons ! I would guide thy steps, 125
“ But first must find my Monarch.”

ALFRED heard,

Unmov’d ; then left his homely toil, and stalk’d
Up to the warrior, and one word he spake—
“ SIGBERT !” and look’d him in the face. The chief
One moment frown’d, when, pallid turn’d his cheek ;
He felt distraction, and, that instant sank
Speechless upon his knee. Him ALFRED rais’d,
And forth conducted to a grove of firs,
Secure and silent—when he thus began : 135

" Thou seest me, SIGBERT ! not as heretofore
 " Albion's proud Potentate, but thus reduced
 " To menial service. In this guise, I am,
 " Hanging on fortune ; but, the time is come,
 " When other scenes await me. I must now 140
 " Go forth to conquer, or, for ever close
 " These eyes in death. Life can no longer bear
 " This heavy clog, this wasting of the frame:
 " Oh, SIGBERT ! in an evil hour I left
 " ALSWITHA and my child within the walls 145
 " Of Glastonbury ! Now, the passing gale
 " Sweeps o'er its smoaking ruins ! the fierce Danes
 " Have razed its deep foundations ! She was there,
 " And, 'mid the slaughter, fell !" Awhile he paus'd,
 Then thus continued : " But, good SIGBERT, hear !
 " The child thou saw'st crying beside the Monk,
 " That very child whom thou hast hither brought
 " From yonder heath, is mine, my infant child !
 " Thy hands have saved him ; but, that other loss
 " How shall I bear its weight ? What specious fiend
 " Urged me to leave her ? I remark'd her look,
 " It seem'd to say, " ALFRED, a long farewell !"
 " I never more shall see her,—she is gone !—
 " Gone down to death !"

A silence mark'd the air. 160

Again the Monarch. " SIGBERT ! what a cloud
 " Hangs over us ! My fallen Queen, I mourn ;
 " My friends, now friends no more, but, above all,
 " The state, sick of distemper, that requires

"The boldest remedy. I now will rouse 165

"My heart for high emprise, and on the Danes

"Heaven's hottest vengeance shower ! the die is cast !

"Despair, avaunt ! I have a lion's heart,

"And forth I go to combat."

Then the thought 170

Of his loved Queen swept through his aguish mind,

He back return'd, and said. "I must awhile,

"Sheathe this my sword, and first, ALSWITHA seek,

"Tho' fall'n and perish'd. I must find her corse."

When SIGBERT spake. "Oh best of Kings ! behold

"Thy prostrate servant ! self-accused and mad

"That he should thus address thee ; thus abuse

"Thy patient virtues. Pardon me, my King !

"And if thou dost not hate me, tell me so !"

ALFRED replied. "I do indeed, not hate, 180

"But rather love thee, SIGBERT ! Thou did'st talk

"Like honest freedom in an honest cause :

"Thou thoughtest me a recreant from my King,

"And spaked'st rightly to me. Had all men

"Thy zeal inherited, far other scenes 185

"Would now await us."

SIGBERT, earnest cried :

"Illustrious Prince ! ordain'd to shew mankind

"All that is just in sentiment, or great

"In sufferance, hear my words ! A holy joy,

"That, at my latest hour, shall make my heart

" Leap and with life be satisfied, is this,
 " That I was doom'd by Providence to find
 " Thy infant child, and, bear him in my arms
 " To place of safety : now, one hope remains, 195
 " That thou wilt let me seek ALSWITHA's fate."
 Yielding to duty what affection claim'd,
 " Go," ALFRED cried; " meantime thy King will haste
 " To Selwood, seek his troops, and arm their breasts
 " With aggravated wrath, then lead them forth 200
 " To rescue ODDUNE, that brave man who lies
 " Immured in Kenwith's walls, and anxious looks
 " For succour. Haste !"

SIGBERT his broad sword girt^s
 More firmly on, and thus to ALFRED spake : 205
 " Here, take thy garment ! look thyself once more !
 " Oh King ! I leave thee ; soon expect to learn
 " Tidings from SIGBERT."

Never had such doubts.
 And sore perplexities on mortals prey'd 210
 As ACCA and CEOLRIC felt, when first
 Their servant spake the warrior, whom they saw
 Fall on one knee and tremble, whilst the man,
 Self-confident, led, with commanding air
 And aspect bold, to the near grove of firs, 215
 The armed Chief, so terrible. They gazed,
 Astonish'd, when CEOLRIC thus began :

^s The Saxon sword was much larger than that used by the Danes, often three feet in length, and without curvature.

" It is a sight, which makes my teeth and knees
 " Chatter and shake. Whom think you is the man
 " That thus the warrior bold should look amazed, 220
 " Kneeling in terror? Hast thou never heard
 " Of spirits that assume our outward form,
 " And do the work of men, and come and go
 " At pleasure? This strange deed doth so confuse
 " My mind, that I can scarce believe or think 225
 " As I am wont to do. Whence came he first?"

Acca again repeated her past tale,
 How that he asked for bread, and pleaded hard
 To stay and rest himself, and do the work
 Of servile office. " But, I think his eye 230
 " Betray'd dark meaning, for I strove to chide,
 " And send him forward, but his winning speech
 " So on me wrought, that I could only say,
 " Come in! I had no other power, and thus
 " The man came in: but now it strikes my mind,
 " His gait! and attitude! and his wild looks,
 " And manner! 'Tis a wicked sprite! and then,
 " The warrior! did'st thou touch him? Husband! Why
 " That look of terror? Comfort me and say
 " That thou art not a spirit! for my brain 240
 " Swims with uncertainty."

In doubts like these,
 The time pass'd on, when, at the cottage door
 ALFRED appear'd. That moment Acca shriek'd,
 Whilst trembling stood CEOLRIC, whose pale lips 245

Mutter'd the broken prayer. Awhile the King
 Gazed round in wonderment. The sudden change,
 He wist not what it meant, and drawing near
 Said slowly. "Friends! why shew you this surprize?"
 "Fear you your servant?" 250

From a neighbouring couch,
 The babe then saw its father, whose fresh dress
 It knew full well, and stretch'd his little arms
 With proud delight, when ALFRED sprang, and cried
 "My dearest boy!" and press'd him to his heart. 255

The new and sudden transport of the man
 Who call'd the child his own—a deeper shade
 Cast o'er the Neat-herd's mind; who now dismiss'd
 His former apprehensions, and drew near,
 And said, "Good friend, I know thee not, thy name,
 "Nor whence thou comest. Truly, now I think
 "That thou art one of noble blood, and born
 "To honors such as we can ill bestow.
 "Declare thy name and character!"

The King 260

Look'd mild and said. "Know, that who speaks to thee
 "Is ALFRED's self!"—Maddening astonishment
 Rush'd through the Neat-herd's mind. He gazed on earth,
 Silent, when ACCA to the King approach'd:—
 She stood, and would have spoken, but her tongue
 Refused its office. ALFRED thus began:
 "Behold in me, your friend!" When ACCA cried.
 "Art thou our King? and this forsaken child

“ Our hopeful Prince, Prince EDWARD ? Now,
“ My death approaches ! I have seen enough ! 270
“ What ! thou, our brave King ALFRED ? thou, the man
“ Whom I have cross’d, unwittingly ?—deny’d,
“ To this our cot, admission ? Can it be,
“ That I should thus rebuke the best of Kings,
“ And he forgive me ?” 275

ALFRED answer’d—“ Yes,

“ I do forgive thee ! Thou hast shelter given
“ To one,—a dreaming man, whose wilder’d mind
“ Left thy concerns, and wander’d far away ;
“ Whither, you little knew ! and yet you fed, 280
“ And with him bore. But, ACCA ! had thy wrath
“ Sounded eternal like the troubled brook,
“ That deed would cancel all, when thou didst take
“ My starving infant and communicate
“ Food and kind warmth, whilst I, his Father, stood
“ And heard thee comfort him—beheld thee press
“ His shivering hands, close to thy breast, and tell
“ Of his calm sweetness. ’Twas a secret joy,
“ An ecstasy which Angels might desire !”

Now ALFRED call’d the Neat-herd and thus spake :
“ I deem’d it wise to stray, remote from those
“ Who knew and who revered me, that my mind
“ Might ponder well the steep and rugged path
“ That lay before : when, after wandering long
“ O’er trackless deserts and enduring oft 952
“ Hunger, and cold, and peril ; here at length

" I found a refuge ; waiting 'till some hour
 " Of clear and certain meaning call'd me hence :
 " That hour is come ! for ODDUNE, my brave friend,
 " Now sighs in vain for succour, 'mid the walls 300
 " Of Kenwith's castle. Neat-herd, hear thy Prince !
 " Thou shalt become my herald ! Straight prepare
 " To bear this message ! Flee to ODDUNE ! say,
 " The King approaches. Tell him I am roused,
 " And God will aid us. Warn him to defend 305
 " Right manfully the castle walls from whence
 " He soon shall view me hastening with a host
 " Of firm and gallant warriors. Go thy way !
 " And in the depths of Selwood, meet thy King."

CEOLRIC heard, and forth his sandals brought, 310
 And took his knotted staff, and then drew near
 And boldly cried, " Thy servant will perform
 " All thou hast said, oh King ! No time, nor toil,
 " Nor danger shall deter him : he will haste,
 " Fearless, to do thy will. God favor him ! 315
 " And give thee soon, peace and prosperity."
 The Neat-herd then departed ; when, his boy
 ALFRED embraced, and thus to ACCA spake :

" I now must go 'mid other scenes and strifes,
 " Sorrows and dangers : ill it would beseem 320
 " This babe to follow me : him must I leave
 " Where caution and fidelity may join
 " Their hands to serve him. He has lost a friend—

" A mother who adored her infant child!
" And I, a wife most dear. Oh look not at me ! 325
" No common loss is mine."

Silent he stood;

A few short moments, pondering; then again,
" Acca, with thee will I intrust my child!
" Thou hast a heart of tenderness ; I mark'd 330
" Its secret workings ; I can leave my boy
" With thee contented; thou shalt be his guard,
" This cot his dwelling; and, when I again
" Return and find him safe, thou need'st not doubt
" A Monarch's gratitude." 335

Acca replied,

" Well shall my care repay thy confidence!
" Not from the hope of future recompence,
" But that I love the child. Him will I guard
" Both when he sleeps, and wakes, and when thou com'st
" Again to seek thine infant, I will shew
" His growing limbs, that from unceasing care,
" Spread out and thrive, and tell the silent tale
" Of health and tenderness."

When thus the King:

" I know that thou wilt guard him and display 345
" A mother's fondness." Close he clasp'd his boy,
And blessed him, and to the God of Heaven
Preferred a prayer : when ALFRED left the door,
And urged his way to Selwood's forest shade.

ALFRED. BOOK VI.

ARGUMENT.

SIGBERT departs from Ethelney to gain some tidings of Alswitba ; is taken prisoner by Gutbrum the Danish General ; dismissed to bear a threatening message to Alfred.

TO learn some tidings of the fallen Queen,
SIGBERT, from Ethelney, o'er moor and fen,¹
Went musing on : now high with hope, now damp'd
With sudden apprehensions, then again
Heedless of danger. Eve was drawing near: 5
He long had journeyed, and it cheer'd his heart,
When having pass'd a forest, vast and dark,
To find a cottage.

Toward the door he sped,
But, ere he reach'd it, sounds of boisterous grief, 10
And shrieks, burst forth : awhile he stood and paus'd.
Again the shriek ! he felt his sword, and came
Bold to the spot. It was two armed Danes,
Who, ranging far for spoil, had here arrived,
And death was with them. Through the doors he rush'd—
The furious SIGBERT ; when he saw a man,
An aged man, hard struggling, stretch'd on earth ;

¹ Ethelney was surrounded by a swamp or marsh, and not to be approached but by one narrow passage. It was situated at the conflux of the Thone and Parret, a few miles from Taunton.

Whilst the two Danes, in act of murder, stood,
And saw their prey, and laugh'd to hear the cries
Of one, his daughter. "Stay your savage hands!" 20
Said SIGBERT, as he grasp'd his sword, and came
Firm to the fight. The Danes up leap'd and seized
Sudden their swords.

Not happier feels the man
When wandering far o'er moors and lofty downs, 25
The snows descending fast, the driving sleet,
And night approaching, whilst the scene presents
One wilderness all white, one yawning grave;
Not happier feels that man, whilst pausing sad,
To hear some village clock, from vale beneath 30
Sounding the knell of time, that tells the tale
Of neighbouring habitation and of rest,
Than SIGBERT felt to see these Danes. His eye
Fierce flashing half unman'd them. "Come," he cried.
The strife began! Fierce are the combatants! 35
How shrinks each Dane, before the Saxon's might!
They fall! and SIGBERT stands the conqueror.
"Lie there!" he cried, as through their hearts he plung'd
His crimson blade.

SIGBERT, the cottager 40
Rais'd, wild with fear, whilst she, his daughter, came,
And, falling on one knee, said naught; her eye
Look'd at the valiant Saxon with a look
More eloquent, than words, and all the pomp
And pageantry of praise. He bade her rise; 45
When thus the old man spake: "I first must thank

" My God for my deliverance, then thee."
" Aye," SIGBERT spake, " thank God, the work is his,
" I am his servant; he it was who screen'd,
" At such a time as this, my head, and fired 50
" My breast with vengeance. Blessed was the deed!
" Saw you their pleading eyes, yon prostrate Danes,
" And how I scorn'd them? Come my aged sire,
" Rest here, and you his daughter. Joy it yields
" This heart to think my sword hath now been stain'd
" With Danish blood, and that I feel a thirst
" Still to go on destroying. Forth declare,
" Good father! how these Danes assaulted you,
" And whence they came.

The old man shook his head,
Then said, " Your task is difficult, oh Chief!

" And I am sad. The horrible abyss
" From which I just am rais'd, doth so o'erpower
" And dim my recollection, that awhile
" I must look round and think. My daughter, safe ! 65
" And I, in mine own house! and there, the Danes,
" Prostrate and slain ! Now, Chieftain! who art thou?"
SIGBERT replied, " I am, good father! one
" Who travelleth this way on embassy
" Of no small moment. I am ALFRED's friend— 70
" Our glorious Prince! Sent hither to inquire
" Of Glastonbury, whose stupendous walls,
" Now are in ruins. There was one within,
" Whom the King loved and honor'd. Dost thou know
" Aught of its dwellers?" 75

“ Yes,” the old man spake ;
“ And what it is, is thine. A few days back,
“ A monk came by, and in his arms he bore
“ An infant boy, I asked him whence he came ;
“ The Danes, he said, had plundered his abode, 80
“ The place thou namedst; murder’d every soul,
“ All but himself and the young child he bore.”
“ Dost thou say all,” cried SIGBERT, “ every soul ?”
“ Aye, every soul,” the old man answer’d, “ save—
“ That monk who through the flames rush’d with the babe,
“ And thus escaped miraculous.”

“ The man
“ Thou namest,” SIGBERT said, “ I lately found,
“ Murder’d on yonder heath; the little child
“ Beneath his cloak, and living. But, old man! 90
“ That child was ALFRED’S—ALFRED’S, our good King!
“ Whom, with his Queen ALSWITHA, in that place,
“ Now burnt and fall’n, as in a safe abode,
“ He left, and journey’d on.”

The old man cried, 95
“ What ALFRED’S! that his child!” “ Yes,” SIGBERT said.
“ And, at my Monarch’s words, I hither came
“ To seek ALSWITHA, or obtain some news
“ Or rumour of her fate.” The old man spake:
“ Good warrior! ’tis in vain. The Queen is dead! 100
“ For, when the monk approach’d, and shew’d the babe,
“ I ask’d him who its parents ; that, he said,
“ He knew not. To the Abbey gates they came,
“ And begg’d for food and shelter; then the man,

- “ Who by thy words was ALFRED, left them there.
“ If thou the Queen art seeking, vain thy search,
“ For oft, and with fresh emphasis, the Monk
“ Exclaimed bitterly—I, only I,
“ And this poor babe are left.
“ God bless our Prince!
“ Oh what a heavy crown is his! his woes
“ Are deep and manifold; but, that his boy—
“ His infant boy is safe, in truth, my heart,
“ At such a time, not prone to idle joy,
“ Beats high with transport. But, his murder'd Queen!
“ Aye, that will grieve him. God, I trust will yet
“ Have pity on so wrong'd a King, and give
“ Peace and deliverance, and let him see
“ Good days, and many. Not a man there lives
“ On saxon soil, who would not, him to serve, 120
“ All dangers brave.
“ Thy sword has rescued me,
“ Bold stranger! at an hour most terrible,
“ For whilst I welcomed death, I turn'd and saw
“ My helpless daughter, the devoted prey, 125
“ When I was gone—oh spare me, warrior! then
“ Death had ten thousand terrors.
“ We must now
“ Leave this abode, though dear to me, the spot
“ Where my forefathers dwelt, and I was born; 130
“ And where I hoped to spend my few short days
“ In quietness; but I must leave it all!
“ Good warrior! not a flower, or shrub, or tree,

" Around my little dwelling, but these hands
 " Have planted ; I have mark'd their varied growth,
 " Joyful, from year to year, and called them all,
 " God pardon! my mute children; for they all
 " Were very dear to me. The pear-tree tall,
 " My oft-shorn hedge-row, and the wicker gate
 " Made by these hands; the green and level plat; 140
 " The woodbine, climbing up, or, through the door,
 " That came, mild visitant! to give its sweets
 " To him who rear'd it; and the martin gay,
 " That round my thatch built ever. Well! in vain
 " These eyes survey the past, the time is come, 145
 " And I must bid adieu—to scenes so fair!

" Now Warrior! it is eve, and I will forth
 " Set forward on my journey. I shall haste
 " To Cambria's shore, where many friends abide,
 " (But chief, a minstrel in the court who dwells)² 150

² There were twenty-four great officers in the Court of the Kings of Wales, sixteen belonging to the King, and eight belonging to the Queen. The King's officers were the following :
 1. The *Mayor of the Palace*, who was also General of the Army, 2. The *Priest of the Household*, who sat at the royal table to bless the meat, and chant the Lord's prayer. 3. The *Steward*, one of whose perquisites was the following : " As much of every cask of plain ale shall belong to the steward of the household, as he can reach with his middle finger dipped into it, and as much of every cask of ale with spiceries, as he can reach with the second joint of his middle finger, and as much of every cask of mead as he can reach with the first joint of the same finger." 4. The *Master of the Hawks*, who was permitted to sit at the King's table, but who entered into a stipulation that he would drink no more than three times, lest he should become intoxicated and neglect his birds. 5. The *Judge of the Household*, the most indispensable of whose qualifications were, a learned education and a long beard : he presided at the contests of the poets and musicians which were frequently held before the King. 6. The *Master of the Horse*. 7. The *Chamberlain*, one of whose obligations was, to provide clean straw and rushes for the King's bed. 8. The *Chief Musician or Bard*. This officer was always very highly esteemed by the Welsh Kings. He sat at the King's table next to the

" For never will I touch these men, these Danes.
 " Here let them lie ! This cottage was the seat
 " Of peace, and blood affrights me: 'tis a sight
 " Arm'd with new horrors. Prowling are the Danes
 " In every path, but I will yet attempt 155
 " At this still hour, my daughter to conduct
 " To house of safety. Wilt thou, with me, flee
 " To Cambria? I have friends," the old man said,
 " Who will repay thee, aye, with better words,
 " And oftener named than I; for I am old, 160
 " And time it takes me to revolve and tell
 " What thanks are due."

SIGBERT replied: " Good friend!
 " It cheers me well to know that I have saved
 " Thy life, and this thy daughter's: she is young,
 " And many snares are round for innocence:
 " Flee thou to Cambria, wise is the resolve,

Mayor of the Palace. " At the time he was invested with his office, the King presented him with a harp, and the Queen with a gold ring, both which he was obliged to keep as long as he lived. It was his duty to sing and play before the King, 1st. the praises of God, 2d. the praises of the King, 3d. a subject of his own choice. He attended the army to battle, and before an engagement, sang and played a particular song called the British Empire. 9. The *Silentiary*. It was the duty of this officer to command silence in the hall when the King sat down to table; and when any quarrelling or improper noise arose, he immediately quashed it by striking the pillar with his rod. 10. The *Master of the Huntsmen*, who whenever he gave his oath was not required to swear, in the way that others did, but always by his horse and his dogs. 11. The *Mead Maker*. 12. The *Physician*, whose fee for curing slight wounds was, all the garments that had been stained with blood: for fractured skulls or broken legs or arms, he was entitled in addition to 180 pence. 13. The *Butler*. 14. The *Porter*, who was gentleman-usher to the King, and who was entitled, at each of the great festivals, to three horns-full of a certain liquor called the twelve apostles. 15. The *Master Cook*; and 16, The *Master of the Lights*. Besides these sixteen officers, and the eight who were attached to the Queen, there were eleven others employed in the King's household, one of whom was a young gentleman, whose duty it was to sit on the floor, with his back to the fire, and hold the King's feet in his bosom all the time he sat at table, to keep them comfortably warm.

" And Heaven protect thee; but for me to shun
 " The ills that stalk abroad, and with thee seek
 " Safety in flight, would bring down lightnings fierce.
 " I have beheld my earthly all a wreck,
 " And vow'd eternal vengeance; I have sworn
 " To live but to destroy, to thirst alone
 " For danish blood. Did I not serve right well
 " These mailed dogs? See how they grin at me! 175
 " 'Twas my first onset, and from this I deem
 " My second shall be like it. I must now
 " To do my master's service; fare ye well!"
 " Stop!" cried the cottager. " We will go forth
 " Together. I am old, and many fears 180
 " Creep through me. But our food we first must part."
 And as he sought it, slow the daughter came
 From her low seat, and said:

" Oh master! take
 " My humble thanks! I have been watching thee, 185
 " And goodly is thy sight, for thou hast saved
 " My aged father! thou hast rescued me!
 " And, at a time!—Warrior, receive my thanks!
 " And Heaven reward thee, at some trying hour,
 " When hope shall be gone by; at such an hour 190
 " As we have known."

SIGBERT thus answer'd her:

" I am most happy, maiden! God it was
 " That sent me your deliverer. Trust in him,
 " And he will yet defend you." 195
 Whilst he spake,

The old man entered. In his arms he bore
Two flaggons, and some homely food. He said,
" Here, warrior ! freely take, for thou may'st go
" Long ways, and toilsome, ere thou find again 200
" Or food or shelter ; such has been the dread
" Of danish wrath, that all have fled their homes,
" As we are fleeing."

Quitting then the house,
SIGBERT, kind parting took. The cottager 205
Moved on disconsolate, and the loved child,
His daughter. Clear the heavens and luminous ;
The moon was at her full, and SIGBERT stood,
Unseen, to mark the houseless man turn round,
And view his cottage. Forward then he walk'd 210
A little space, and, turning, look'd again,
As loath to leave it; whilst his daughter saw,
And would have wept, but for her aged sire.

Now deepening mists shrouded the silver moon,
And tempests threaten'd. SIGBERT o'er the top 215
Of a bleak hill moved on, and what the dread
That shook his bosom, when he look'd and saw
The distant flames arise, whilst heaven's wide vault
Shone with nocturnal day ! Well could he trace
The wasteful hand of Danes. 220

Now down he came,
And, wandering through a vale, shadowy and calm,
Espied a ruined Abbey. To the spot
He hastened, and beheld the mouldering walls,

Black with the rust of age, and all within, 225
Silence and waste ; while not a sound was heard,
But the wind moaning, not a form beheld,
Save one that fancy imaged to his mind—

The SPIRIT OF DESTRUCTION. She who haunts
The moss-grown temples, and the wild resorts 230
Of bats and scorpions; where no mortal steps
Make the walls murmur with obtrusive sounds;
But cries and screeches from all hated beings
Sound evermore, whilst the whole progeny
Of doleful things, that court rank solitude, 235
Thrive and make merriment. Upon a pile
She loves to sit, of broken monuments,
And o'er the scene casts an exultant eye;
Smiling to view the massy pillars fallen—
The aged altars—trophies—pedestals; 240
And where the invulnerable shaft withstands
Her hate and her derision, round she strews
The creeping ivy, with its living shade
To hide all forms of man.

He pass'd the door, 245
When, with a sudden shriek, near him he saw
A woman flying. Through the porch she rush'd,
Whom SIGBERT follow'd : when she turn'd and cried—
“ Pity the wretched ! Art thou one of us ?—
“ A Saxon ? ” “ Yes,” the warrior said “ I am ; 250
“ A servant liege of ALFRED our good King;
“ And who art thou ? ” the woman strove to say,
But loud and fast her heart beat and denied

The feeble utterance. SIGBERT spake again :

“ Oh woman! dost thou know, or hast thou heard 255

“ Aught of our Queen ALSWITHA? I am bound

“ To learn some tidings of her. She, I fear,

“ Perish'd when Glastonbury fell. Unknown,

“ Fearful to tell her rank, she there had fled

“ For safety. When the Danes prevail'd, the King 260

“ Learn'd the disaster, and commissioned me

“ His servant to find out her certain fate.

“ Hast thou, good woman! heard of her I speak,

“ The Queen ?”

The woman answer'd, “ Thou hast said,

“ Her name unknown, and yet inquirest of me

“ For ALFRED's Queen! Am I a prophetess?

“ Yet, from most unlook'd quarter, I have heard

“ A rumour that ALSWITHA lives; but, more,

“ Ask not to learn, for I have oft been told 270

“ Of ALFRED, and his laws and charities,

“ And long to see him. Lead me to the King!

“ To him alone will I my tale disclose.”

The warrior cried, “ This is most hard to bear!

“ But we shall soon behold him. He is now 275

“ In Selwood's forest; whither, by the eve,

“ We, too, may be.” When thus the woman spake.

“ I thank thee, stranger! but my frame is weak,

“ I have been fasting long.” SIGBERT exclaim'd.

“ Joy to the friendly cottager! his food 280

“ Shall well supply us.” Then they ate and drank.

" When SIGBERT thus: " Declare how cam'st thou here,
 " For sore it puzzles me." The woman said,
 " Bewildering thoughts oppress me. Pass we on,
 " Patient awhile, and when my mind is free, 285
 " My tongue shall speak."

They both together sped,
 Pondering in silence, 'till the morning light
 Glow'd in the east. When SIGBERT cried: " Declare,
 " Forth, thy mysterious tale. " No wondrous words,
 " Warrior!" the woman spake, " have I to name;
 " I am but one of those whom Danes have forced
 " To leave their homes; but if thou seekest more,
 " Stay till we visit ALFRED."

SIGBERT cried, 295
 " Thou mockest me, oh woman! I am one
 " Who cannot brook delay. Full many an hour,
 " I have walked silently, revolving oft
 " On thine adventures, and the hidden things
 " Thou knowest of the Queen. Begin thy tale! 300
 Rouse not a warrior's ire!

He scarce had said,
 When on a hill beside them, there appear'd
 A host of horsemen, riding furious on,
 When SIGBERT saw and knew that they were Danes.
 Each would have fled, but on a down they were,
 No covert near. The woman, too, beheld,
 And shivering at her heart, feebly inquired,
 " Are those the Danes? I know their iron mail! 3

3 The whole of the defensive armour of the Danes, has not been exactly ascertained; in an

“ Those are the Danes.” When, looking upward, both
Stood motionless and saw their certain ends.

It was a danish army led by one—
The aged GUTHRUM⁴—terrible and fierce,
And up they came. The woman stepping on,
Thus to the chieftain spake.

315

“ Dane! view in me,
“ A wife, a mother! let me pass unharm’d.”
When thus the chief: “ That thou a mother art,
“ I heed it not, but there is in thy port
“ A something that half awes me. Wherefore thus,
“ Learn’dst thou to speak, and, on destruction’s brink
“ Stand calm and fearless? Whither art thou bound?
“ Thy name!

The woman spake: “ Behold in me

“ A wretched being; one whom many cares
“ Have lighted on—severe and deadly cares,
“ Such and so deep, that one desire alone
“ Now buoys my spirit. Let me go in peace!
“ Oh chieftain! hast thou never felt a joy,
“ Shoot through thy frame, when, after wandering far,
“ Thou turnest homeward, and hast now descry’d
“ Thy loved abode? Just such tumultuous joy

325

uncertain point therefore, I may be permitted to represent the Danes as clad in a coat of mail, without violating the known costume of the times, especially as some of our antiquaries have discovered ancient drawings of Danes, clad in a scaly kind of mail, which closely fitted the whole body; although it is not precisely known at what time this armour was worn.

⁴ History informs us that Guthrum was converted to Christianity; his mind therefore was gradually prepared by circumstances for the change which he afterwards made in his religion.

“ Rush’d through my heart, before I saw these bands,
 “ And thee their leader. As thou valu’st home,
 “ Let me depart, and happiness be thine.” 335

The Dane look’d down and seem’d to feel within
 Strong tumults, when he cried: “ Away with thee,
 “ Thou subtle pleader! what and whence thou art,
 “ I know not! but thy speech doth so inspire
 “ My mind with unknown thoughts, that I suspect 340
 “ Thine is some secret charm. Forbear awhile!
 “ Let me address this Saxon.”

“ Art thou, too,
 “ So smooth of tongue, and with such winning words
 “ Arm’d to defeat my fury? Though thou speak’st
 “ Soft as the song of BRAG,⁵ it shall not change
 “ GUTHRUM’S fix’d purpose. Say! why Saxons dare
 “ Contend with Danes for victory.”

“ Oh Chief!”

SIGBERT replied, “ dost thou with settled brow 350
 “ Inquire why we oppose the Danes? why we
 “ Defend our country?—Know! we yet are free,
 “ And freedom prize more than we dread thy wrath.
 “ Warrior! thou art a Dane! and I am now,
 “ As one that is not, for the Danes ne’er spare: 355
 “ They never hear the pleader, Mercy’s voice,
 “ And feel forgiveness. Take my single life!
 “ But, by the blood of thousands now no more;

⁵ Brag, amongst the Scandinavians, was the god of eloquence, and remarkable for the melody of his voice.

" But, by the wrath of thousands yet unborn ;
" But, by the eternal justice—this I swear— 360
" Thou deeply shalt bewail 'it. Fierce of eye
" Thou seest thy prey, and each quick breath I draw
" Sounds like my last: yet will I fearless speak
" While life remain. Dost thou, proud chieftain! ask
" Why we withstand the Danes? we have our homes—
" Our altars to defend—our children—wives—
" Our king—the best of kings! whom God will yet
" Deliver with his mighty arm, and hurl
" On every Dane his fiercest thunders. Back !
" Flee to your woods and caverns! leave our soil 370
" That groans beneath you! leave our suffering Prince!
" And quit this land, and, o'er the ocean haste!
" Or, like devouring meteors, swords shall rise,
" And ye shall gaze on ruin, like a flood
" That to destruction sweeps the danish race." 375

Wondering at speech so wild, GUTHRUM replied:
" Thy tongue doth so o'erleap all modesty,
" That I, in truth, could smile. Words not a few
" Are thy strong mail—thy towers invincible!
" But, didst thou think, with ravings such as these, 380
" To check a Dane triumphant? Know, vain man!
" I hear a voice within—a well-known voice—
" The ruler of the Gods! He bids me go
" From fight to fight, from distant land to land,
" Disdainful of all dangers. Hear me, man! 385
" Though danish heart I boast, I yet can shun

" To take so mean a life. Do this and live !
 " Cast on the ground thine armour; hang thy sword
 " On yonder spray, alike the dread of Danes!
 " Then, hither come, and swear that thou wilt hence,
 " Own for thy sovereign—Ivar, and our chief,
 " The gallant HUBBA, so shalt thou escape
 " The wrath that might consume thee."

SIGBERT cried—

" I, throw away my arms ! reject my King ! 395
 " And own for my liege Sovereigns whom thou call'st
 " Ivar and HUBBA ! when, with labourings dire,
 " And mortal throe, earth shall again bring forth
 " Such monsters as the Danes, then will I fall
 " Before thy moloch Princes, and forget 400
 " My name and country. What hast thou to grant,
 " Or to withhold, that I should blast my hopes,
 " Renounce the best of Kings, and stain my tongue
 " With blasphemy, in calling those I hate,
 " Loathe, execrate—my good and lawful Kings— 405
 " Ivar and HUBBA ? Know, thou haughty Dane,
 " I scorn thy power ! I scorn thy legion'd host :
 " I scorn ye all ! and, if to death ordain'd,
 " Death shall be sweeten'd with one thought, oh Chief !
 " That I have vanquish'd thee." His sword he rais'd,
 And waved it in defiance.

Cried the Dane,

" Parley is over ! by the Gods above,
 " This sword shall end thee ;" as he drew it forth,
 And rush'd to meet him. 415

Fierce the combatants !

Both SIGBERT and the Dane. Saxon ! thy sword !
Thou hast it not ! Where art thou now ? — On earth
Prostrate lies SIGBERT ; over, stands the Dane,
And with his pendent weapon, cries, “ Now, man ! 420
“ How feel'st thou ? where thy life ? ” When SIGBERT cried,
(Fiercer as death drew near) “ Thou cursed of Heaven !
“ Destroy me ! here I lie ; my naked breast
“ Courts thee to strike, and, when I say forbear,
“ Question my hate of thee ! ” 425

GUTHRUM his sword

Uprais'd, and, as it fell, the woman rush'd
Between, and cried, “ Oh warrior ! stay thy hand,
“ Murder him not ! or with him, murder me ! ”
Wondering stood GUTHRUM. Thus again she spake :

“ Pardon me, Chieftain ! in thy face I see
“ Marks of no common character : there dwells
“ Greatness, but, ill-directed ; valour, truth,
“ That might thy name exalt to highest heaven,
“ And make thee, as thou truly ought'st to be, 435
“ A Friend—a Benefactor to thy race.
“ But thou hast wander'd far ! thy mind is dark !
“ Thou trustest in the Gods, who, like thyself,
“ Were once of flesh and blood ; who wander'd far,
“ Destroying and destroy'd. Brave Chieftain ! know,
“ There is one God alone, one Lord, who sits
“ High in yon starry vault, and with a thought,
“ Thro' Heaven, thro' Earth, all things directs. His name

“ No tongue hath dared declare. He is that God
“ Who call’d us into being, who supports 445
“ All life—Omnipotent—Sovereign supreme.
“ He, with his voice of thunder, bids us learn
“ To love each other, and to know that all,
“ The ruler and the ruled, the rich and poor,
“ The prince and beggar! .born in sultry climes, 450
“ Or where eternal snows all nature hide,
“ His children are, and destined to partake
“ In future worlds, after wise discipline,
“ His bounty. This Almighty God hath said—
“ Thou shalt not murder! Love thine enemies! 455
“ And, spare the vanquish’d! then, when life is o’er,
“ To mansions where yon shining orb abides,
“ With all the brave and merciful, your souls
“ Shall live for ever.” Now, oh warrior! check
“ That fierce and deadly wrath, and, dwell with those,
“ High in yon heavens, who suffer’d and forgave.”

The chieftain dropp’d his sword, and, slow, inquired,
“ Where is my heart? What sudden power is this,
“ That through my frame moves on, and makes my arm,
“ Tremble and hesitate to strike? this arm, 465
“ That hath its hundreds slain, and combat dared,
“ And most fierce onset, when the very air
“ Drank blood! such countless wounds at once all rais’d
“ Their crimson torrents—I, myself, suspect.”
When, turning to his troops, the warrior cried: 470
“ Am I your chieftain? for this day hath seen

" My sword draw back from blood!"

GUTHRUM look'd up;
And saw the woman nigh, then thus again:

" Thy words I well could hear, and well despise, 475

" Oh woman! but a something in thine air—

" A grace, a majesty, doth make me feel,

" Altho' a Dane, well arm'd, and as thou seest

" Surrounded by this host of valiant men,

" A most strange littleness. I half forgot 480

" That I am Denmark's chief, and thou a slave!

" Away ye dastard feelings! I will now

" Rise from this lethargy, and be myself

" Once more.

" Did not a Saxon man defy 485

" GUTHRUM the Dane, and with presumptuous threats

" Offer him battle? was it a vain thought?

" Or, was it thee? (to SIGBERT low he said)

" Seal'd is thy destiny! for I will now

" Deal this thy due." When high he rais'd his sword,

And as all hearts stood still, waiting the blow—

Sudden he sheath'd it, and aloud exclaim'd,

" Saxon, receive thy life! for thou art brave,

" And never shall the brave man meet his death⁶

6 Notwithstanding the general ferocity of the Danes, on some occasions they displayed the most striking instances of generosity. " When a danish Prince had attained his eighteenth or twentieth year, he commonly requested of his father a small fleet, completely fitted out, in order to achieve with his followers, some adventure that might be productive of glory and spoil. The father, applauding such an inclination in his son, gave him ships, and required of him an engagement that he would not return, unless adorned with trophies, and loaded with

- " From me, old GUTHRUM. Rise! I spare thy life!
 " Thou shalt become my herald. Bear these words
 " To him thy master, ALFRED, whose high soul
 " Thou well canst imitate. Inform the King
 " One certain fate awaits him ; tell him I,
 " GUTHRUM the danish chief, am journeying on 500
 " Toward Kenwith, where the trembling ODDUNE lies,
 " And starves for succour, whilst around the walls
 " HUBBA, my prince, encamps. I thither go,
 " To vanquish that proud Saxon, and to dogs
 " His carcass cast; when, by the Gods on high— 505
 " By ODIN, THOR and FREYA⁷, and the race

plunder. That nation became the first object of their resentment from whom they had received any injury, and frequently their principal aim was to make reprisals on some province which served for the retreat of other Corsairs. If the fleets of two different nations met by chance in their voyage, they never missed such an occasion for fighting. The vanquished party was commonly put to death, though sometimes the conquerors were contented to make them slaves; and often by a singular strain of generosity, which the love of glory was able to produce in minds in other respects so distinguished for cruelty, if the enemy that fell in their way had fewer ships than themselves, they set aside part of their own vessels, and so engaged upon equal terms, that the victory might not be attributed to superiority of number. Sometimes the chiefs resolved upon deciding it by single combat: in this case they landed upon the nearest shore: if one of them happened to be disarmed or thrown down, he frequently refused to receive quarter, and was killed on the spot: but if he defended himself gallantly, the victor frequently granted him his life, demanded his friendship, adopted him for a kind of foster-brother, and they mutually swore to preserve an eternal friendship. In token of this alliance, the two heroes sometimes made incisions in their hands and arms, and smeared their weapons with their blood, or mixing it with their cups, each of them covering his head with a sod; drank of it, swearing, that the death of the first of them who died in battle should not pass unrevengeed by the survivor." Harce and Grymer were two princes of the North, who, quarrelling, after a dreadful battle, the former was subdued. Grymer, instead of putting his opponent to death, addressed him in the following words. "The king my father-in-law has lost his life, and thy son is slain; let our mutual losses be deemed equal, and let the death of Grunder atone and compensate for that of Eric. For thee, oh king! accept at my hand both life and peace. Thou hast signalized thyself in combat, keep therefore thy mighty ships and thy Bearmian kingdom."

⁷ The three principal deities of the Scandinavians. A brief account of Odin was given in

" Of matchless deities, who throng the halls
 " Of Valhall, we will hunt thy Monarch out,
 " And if this land contain him, whether hid
 " In glen or cavern, wood or mountain bare, 510
 " This sword shall find, and these exulting eyes
 " Gaze on his mangled corse. Tell thou thy King,
 " His doom is certain! Let him call and pray
 " To the great God thou servest, and behold
 " Whether his might can aid, when Danes approach
 " Thy Monarch's hiding-place. His voice may sound
 " Loud and more loud, but he shall find how vain
 " To call for aid, when Denmark's warriors claim
 " Their fated prey."

SIEBERT arose and said : 520

" Chieftain, I thank thee! Thou wilt never mourn
 " This deed: but I have one request, on which
 " Yet hangs my life. GUTHRUM hath said, depart!
 " But, warrior! how can I depart, and leave
 " This friend a captive? Bid her haste with me, 525
 " And tho' a foe, I could adore thee for it!"

The Dane assumed a fiercer frown and cried,
 " Thy life I give thee, but, presumptuous man!
 " No more require; or, by the powers above, 530
 " Here shalt thou lie, a spectacle to tell

the 3d Note of the 1st book. Freya was the wife of Odin, and Thor the bravest of their sons. These three formed a supreme council of the Gods. Independently of these, there were many other deities, of whom the following were the most famous: Niord, the god of the seas. Balder, the god of light; Tyr the god of champions; Helmdal, the door-keeper of the gods; and Lok, by some reckoned a god, although he was the pest of both gods and men.

" What rashness merits ! I will hence convey
 " This woman, she shall be my counsellor ;
 " Her words so strong and piercing, have so wrought
 " Upon my mind, that I desire to have 535
 " Her further converse. She with me shall go
 " And tell me of that God, the Spirit vast
 " Which late she spake of, whom I may compare
 " With ODIN and our Gods : and she shall live
 " Contented with my child, yon damsel fair, 540
 " Who follows me her father." When there came
 Forward, with graceful air, a maid whose look
 Spake of benignity. Mildly she said,
 " Stranger, thy friend am I." The woman look'd
 Startled, yet not a word she spake, but gave 545
 Gently her hand.

GUTHRUM again exclaim'd,

" Move, or forever stay ! but by this sword⁸
 " No harm shall touch the woman ! I have sworn,
 " And never was an oath by GUTHRUM scorn'd. 550
 " Haste therefore, satisfied ; for she shall live
 " Pure as her eye is terrible. Away !"

When thus, bending to earth, the woman spake :
 " Oh warrior, let me go ! nor thus oppress
 " A poor weak woman. Didst thou know what calls
 " Sound in mine ear, thou wouldst regard my words
 " And let me harmless pass ; for I have one,
 " Far off, a husband, who my absence mourns,

⁸ It was common for the Danes to swear " by their swords."

" And who would die to hear that I was met
 " By thee, oh Chieftain! and perforce convey'd 560
 " He knew not where. Pity my many woes,
 " And let me call thee blessed!"

GUTHRUM look'd
 Stern, and thus answered her. "Thou plead'st in vain!
 " I never change my purpose! Cease to fear! 565
 " My name is GUTHRUM! Tedious thus to wait!
 " Mount yonder steed! and, at some future time
 " Again thou may'st return, and seek thine home."

" To talk of future hopes," the woman said
 " Were vain indeed. I have no future hopes! 570
 " The bird that for her young, flies many a mile,
 " And, glad, returns to seek them, but beholds
 " Her treasure gone, her all, her little all,
 " Gone, and no vestige left, feels such as I:
 " For I am homeward bound, and many thoughts 575
 " Made my heart glad, but thou hast marr'd the whole,
 " And I am now, a poor lost woman, sunk
 " In prostrate misery. If I must go,—
 " Forever leave, one whom my heart adores!—
 " I would submit!" 580

Approaching SIGBERT now,
 Fault'ring she cried, "Thou yet art free!
 " One favour do I ask." When from her neck
 She took a string of pearls,⁹ and with a sigh,

⁹ Alfred, understanding that the Christians of the island of St. Thomas in the East-Indies were in destitute circumstances, sent a deputation to them, overland, with relief; these Chris-

The Saxon thus address'd. " Stranger, take this! 385
 " And if in times, or near, or far remote,
 " Thou should'st address him who remembers these,
 " Declare, she who possess'd them, now endures
 " Sorrows and hard captivity; yet say,
 " She loved her husband—mourn'd her infant child—
 " Gone to his fathers! Tell him, I declared,
 " If e'er he saw me living, he should find
 " My heart still pure; and if, far off, I died,
 " To pity one, who, with her latest breath,
 " Call'd on her husband, and from Heaven implored,
 " Blessings on him and his."

When this was said,
 She, on a charger, with the danish force,
 Sped o'er the plain, reluctant, looking back,
 Whilst SIGBERT turn'd, heartless, to seek the King. 600

tians in return, transmitted to Alfred a variety of pearls and precious stones. Asserius speaks of having seen these jewels, and of having received some, as a present, from Alfred himself. The solicitude which Alfred discovered to increase his geographical knowledge, is shewn by a manuscript of his, a copy of which is brought down to the present times, being the description of the north of Europe, taken down by the king himself from the mouth of a norwegian nobleman, who had penetrated farther north than any other person at that time. A translation of this work from the Saxon, has been given by the Hon. Danes Barrington.

END OF BOOK VI.

ALFRED. BOOK VII.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED on his way to Selwood, meets an army of Saxons, fleeing into Wales from Ivar, who had just landed on Britain with numerous forces from Denmark; Alfred persuades them to accompany him to Selwood Forest; meets his troops; dismisses his Chiefs to arouse his subjects, and declares his intention of immediately marching to rescue Oddune in Kenwith Castle.

SLOW from the cottage door, languid at heart,
The King departed, whilst his fancy pored—
On ODDUNE, close confined, and haply forced
To war with famine, and with wasting grief
Gaze from the watch-tower top, both night and morn
To mark approaching succour;—on the thought,
That never from his mind was absent, but,
When other sorrows came, an entrance gave,
But not possession—of ALSWITHA slain.
In bitterness of spirit thus he cried :

10

“ My sun is hid ! the prospect all around
“ Thick darkness ! on mine eye, no ray alights.
“ I onward move, forlorn and destitute—
“ Half loathing life ! What the deep misery
“ Within his breast, who wears a crown, and feels
“ Its great and heavy charge ! What are his cares—
“ The prince who knows his duties, and revolves

" At noon, and night—at eve and early morn,
 " What best may serve his subjects, but perceives
 " Cares infinite and crosses bar the way!— 20
 " Ruler of Heaven! Almighty Sire! Thy will
 " I fain would follow, but a bitter thing
 " It is to have no hope."

The King look'd up,
 And saw a host of warriors! Near they came,
 And still more near, then instant shouted loud, 25
 " Our King! our King! Long live our glorious King!"
 ALFRED, approaching, thus the Band address'd:
 " My friends and subjects, goodly is your sight
 " At this lone hour. But wherefore on your march?
 " And whither bound?" Their leader thus replied: 30
 " Oh King, we bear sad tidings! there are now,
 " Just landing on thy shores, a host of Danes,
 " Mightier than ever Britain saw—their chief,
 " IVAR the fierce. The company thou seest
 " Are bound to Cambria¹, for on english ground 35
 " No safety dwells."

ALFRED indignant cried:
 " Brave men return, and never flee, who dares
 " Invade our soil!" When one, the same, replied:
 " We must at such a time, resist e'en thee!
 " Death stalks around, our welfare is in flight, 40
 " And we have vow'd, all that before thee stand,
 " To seek in other climes, that safe retreat
 " Thy kingdom cannot yield. Our hopes are flown.

¹ Many Saxons escaped into Wales, from the fury of the Danes.

" These many years have we been combating,
 " And met the Danes, and measured sword with sword,
 " Undaunted, but disasters infinite
 " Attend each day; for still devouring hordes
 " Roam through the land, scatt'ring both far and wide
 " Death and sore perils, and we hence expect
 " Safety alone in flight."

ALFRED arous'd 50

From transient slumber, now was hastening fast,
 To join his subjects, nursing the big thoughts
 Of courage irresistible, and deeds
 By valour done, magnanimous, that led
 To certain triumph; but when he beheld, 55
 In those he met, the ignoble soul that shrank
 From glorious enterprize, he felt his heart
 Sink with such killing damp, as he endures
 Who, journeying o'er some rude and barren waste,
 Perchance Helsingia, or those desert hills 60
 Tydal or Kar,² where the bleak whirlwind roars,

² Two lofty hills in Norway. It was on the former of these hills that several thousand swedish soldiers were frozen to death. It had been the intention of the Swedes to besiege Dronthem, but Budde the Danish general, had made such dispositions, that this design was impracticable; they therefore cantoned themselves amongst the peasants in the neighbourhood till the beginning of the year 1716, when intelligence arrived of the unexpected death of Charles the XIIth before Frederickshall; and the Swedes understanding that the whole danish army was in full march against them, they determined on a precipitate retreat: this could only be accomplished by marching over the lofty and extensive hill of Tydal; hazardous in the extreme, and against which the norwegians themselves had enacted a law restricting all persons from travelling that way, except between the months of May and August, but the present being a desperate case, the Swedes determined upon making the attempt. They set forward, when having reached the summit of the mountain, they were overtaken by a storm of snow, accompanied by intense cold, which froze almost the whole of them to death. A company of two hundred norwegian sledgenen, which followed to observe their retreat, found the Swedes

Eternal, whilst the eddying snows drift round,
 And tempests rave,—sounding their ceaseless war.—
 As he endures, while toiling o'er these scenes
 Of dread magnificence, and in the joys 65
 Of home partaking, when he sees, aghast,
 The bridge that o'er the boisterous torrent hung
 From cleft to cleft, borne from its giddy height
 And the loud-bellowing tide impassable.³

After a moment's pause, ALFRED replied : 70
 " Before you go, I know that you will hear,
 " Patient, your Monarch." Round they all approach'd,
 When thus he spake.

" Subjects! tho' absent long,

on the mountain; some sitting, some lying, and some in a posture of prayer, but all frozen to death. How great their distress must have been may be judged by their cutting their muskets to pieces, in order to burn what little fuel might be obtained from them. Of the whole body, consisting of ten thousand men, not more than two thousand five hundred, or according to others, five hundred escaped to their own country.

³ A very common accident in the mountainous parts of the North. Persons of rank commonly travel through these districts accompanied by men prepared with implements for rectifying any bridge which may have been injured by the torrents. This disappointment, to the poor traveller, often proves fatal, as it is no easy undertaking to return, it may be, thirty or forty miles, over bleak hills, covered with snow and ice, to find another passage, which may still be liable to the same accident. Some of the Norway passes are dangerous, beyond the conception of most travellers. There is a road called the Galleries, under the mountain Filefield, (the only way between two districts in Norway) which to a stranger appears inaccessible; and which is never passed but with horror by the native traveller. It is the way between two stupendous mountains of granite; immense fragments of which have fallen, at different periods, into the stream below, which in some seasons is swelled into a foaming torrent, forcing its way over the mighty crags which obstruct its course. A succession of bridges, with great labour, have been placed from rock to rock through the valley, and a winding road scooped out of the almost perpendicular side of the mountains adjoining; in many places forming an angle of 45 degrees, and so narrow as to admit one man alone and his horse at the same time. If two should happen to meet in this pass, there would be no alternative but one of the men clinging as near to the rock as possible, and after blinding his horse with a cloth, forcing him over the precipice.

- " I have been planning for you, and am now
 " Returning in your cause. The hand of God 75
 " We all have felt, but, let us not despair,
 " And we shall conquer. Think how Saxons met
 " In former times, the Caledonian host,⁴
 " Fierce from their snowy mountains! Think again,
 " How we, undaunted, faced that daring man— 80
 " ROLLO the Norman,⁵ when upon our coast
 " His navy rode, and less than british heart
 " Had awed—such was his might; but in our strength
 " We dared him, and the robber Chieftain fled
 " To ravage weaker climes. So shall the foe, 85
 " That now assaults us, flee. Before the wrath
 " Of injured Saxons, weak the hostile spear
 " And weak the hand that guides it. Ills may rise,

⁴ Till the union of the two crowns, a rooted animosity appeared to subsist between the English and Scotch; from the earliest times violating each others boundaries, and marking their different inroads with the most savage instances of cruelty. For many centuries a large track, bordering on the two countries, remained wholly uncultivated and nearly uninhabited, the few who dwelt there being outlawed and living by murder and depredation: but these evils were inconsiderable compared with the destructive wars carried on between the respective Monarchs, who were actuated by no other principles than plunder and revenge. The wars of John and Alexander were attended with more brutal instances of massacre than are to be met with in the annals of the Caribbees. No one can read, without shuddering, of the battle of Allerton, in the reign of Stephen, when David, with a mighty slaughter was overthrown, after laying waste with fire and sword the counties of Northumberland and Durham. William king of Scotland, in one of his excursions, was taken prisoner after beholding an immense slaughter of his subjects. Edward the first slew sixty thousand Scotch at the battle of Falkirk, and Edward the third slew nearly as many at Hally-down hill. It would be afflicting to humanity to recite the different recorded contests which have taken place between the English and Scotch, during the period of the Romans, Britons, Saxons, and down nearly to the time when the happy union of the two crowns was established.

⁵ In the year 876, Rollo, with a large fleet, appeared on the coast of England, but such were the preparations which Alfred made to resist him, that, fearing to land, he sailed to the coast of France, and succeeded in conquering the province of Normandy, which some years afterwards was regularly ceded, by the king of France, to him and his posterity. It was a descendant of Rollo that became William the first of England.

" Many, and threaten to destroy our race,
" The very name of Saxon, but, the day— 90
" The glorious day of triumph now draws near.

" There is a point in human wretchedness
" Beyond whose bound, the wretched cannot feel,
" And nothing here is lasting. We have felt,
" Each that before me stands, that prostrate state, 95
" That absence of all hope, and we may now
" Look on to happier times. Cheer up brave men!
" The King whom you have served, and by whose side,
" Met the fierce fight undaunted, now demands
" Your further aid—fearless, attend your Prince, 100
" And let him lead you on to victory.
" At hand is my resort, Selwood, where dwell
" A valiant host of Saxons like yourselves;—
" Your brethren meet! Friends, if the name you own,
" Will you forsake me? seek inglorious flight? 105
" Have I thus fought and suffered, now to hear
" The voice of disobedience?—now to find
" A coward's heart in Saxon? am I doom'd
" To reign, but not to rule, and at this hour
" Behold you shun the fight? it cannot be! 110
" Some fiend hath spread the calumny, the sound
" Came from the air, for never english tongue
" Dealt in such words.

" My subjects! I have long
" Endured a weighty burden, I have lived,
" Goaded with cares, that filled my mind by day, 115

- " And when night came, assumed a character
" Ten-fold more fearful. What have I sustain'd
" These ills for?—to support a crazy crown?
" For what have I defied the elements,
" And bared my head, and 'mid the hottest strife 120
" Mix'd evermore?—to guard the name of King?
" Thou know'st, oh heart! that now art beating high,
" Thou know'st it was not! No, these feet have toil'd,
" This mind hath ponder'd, and this head endured
" Life's crushing cares for nobler purposes!— 125
" Whom have you dared the fight for? for your King?
" To save yourselves? or, hurl destruction's brand
" Fierce on the Danes? No, nobler views were yours!
" You fought for liberty! you fought to save
" All that is dear in life—your peaceful homes, 130
" Your helpless sires, your wives, your innocents!
" And, not for these alone, but, distant heirs—
" For generations yet unborn, the race
" Of future Saxons, down to farthest time!
" Who, oft as they shall hear what we endured 135
" To guard their rights, the precious blood we shed
" To make their lives secure, and bid the form
" Of holy Freedom rise, engirt with flowers
" That dare the breath of time, shall look to Heaven,
" And with no common fervour, bless the names 140
" Of us their great forefathers, who for them,
" Endured but triumph'd—suffer'd but obtain'd.—
" Now boldly I advance to meet the foe!
" And you whose hearts shrink with the coward's fear,

" Turn not to me! haste to your safe retreat, 145
" And joy, if joy you can, when far away,
" To think of those who suffer'd from your flight
" To think for what your brethren fought and died."
ALFRED his sword unsheath'd, the scabbard cast
Far in the air, and singly march'd along.— 150
All follow'd, shouting, " Death or Victory!"

ALFRED return'd and cried, " Ye gallant host,
" Receive my praises! now again I see
" My former subjects, now th' inspiring hope,
" Of triumph and prosperity makes glad 155
" My sinking heart, and tempts me to believe
" That we have yet in store good days. Advance!
" Now to the forest near I lead you on."

When ALFRED frown'd and said, " Yet first approach
" The man who dared resist my will, and stood 160
" Foremost for flight." Trembling, the man drew near,
When thus the King: " Be this thy punishment!
" Go thou to Cambria! by thyself depart,
" And we will fight thy battles! we will screen
" Thy children from the fury of the Danes." 165

The man replied, " Pardon an erring mind!
" 'Till these thy words, I little knew the cause
" For which we strove, now do I see aright!
" My heart is true, and if I do not hence
" Strive manfully, and due atonement make 170

“ For past offence—let my sons curse their sire!
 “ And may I roam through Earth, scorn’d of mankind!”
 When ALFRED thus: “ Saxon, my wrath is o’er!
 “ Thou art my friend! Th’ Almighty asks no more,
 “ And why should man?” When this was said, they all
 Sought the near forest Selwood.

Braver men

Ne’er combated misfortune, than who dwelt,
 Embower’d there. When first they heard their King,
 Cry, “ March to Selwood, thither shall ye find
 “ Hope and your Prince together;” on they march’d,
 And in their Monarch’s ills forgot their own;—
 Rearing a fortress.

Round a little hill,

They pitch’d their tents, with trees all cover’d o’er,
 Save where the fort appear’d, that through the limbs
 Of beech and oak and elm, peep’d quietly 185
 Cheering each Saxon’s heart.

And when the hour,

The silent hour of sun-set, deep’ning slow
 Made grey the forest, on the roots of trees,
 Or stones or mosses; many a mournful group
 Sat with fix’d brow, and told some direful tale 190
 Of danish cruelty, hair-breadth escapes,
 Or, filled with sorrow, mourn’d their fallen friends.

’Twas on a tranquil eve when thus they sat
 Communing. In her glory the fair moon
 Shone over head; the breeze of night was still, 195

And quietness, most solemn quietness,
Mark'd all around; save where the bittern's voice
Came from far distance, making yet more plain,
The silence universal. When one spake :

“ Sad apprehensions fill my mind, I feel 200
“ For ALFRED our good King. In wretched state
“ He left us: heavy cares oppress'd his heart,
“ And in the depth of hard inquietude
“ He bade us all farewell. Such wrongs are his,
“ That, how his brain may suffer, we may hope 205
“ But, cannot say. I watch'd him as he spake,
“ He seem'd bewilder'd. Never shall I more
“ Behold the King! his road was perilous,
“ His mind all dark, and some avenging Dane,
“ Or Phrensy, or the moping child of hell— 210
“ Slow Melancholy, him hath seized, and now,
“ Where is the hope of Saxon? Here we are,
“ Eating our pittance, but at length ordain'd
“ To death or abject slavery.” No tongue
Answered the warrior, and, as mute they sat, 215
A noise was heard, each upward sprang and cried,
“ To arms! the enemy !”

Scarce had they said,
When each appear'd clad in his war array.—
Spies are appointed! Now the fearful noise
Came nearer, and more loud and terrible 220
It sounded in their ears. The Chieftains still
Ponder how best to act, when one exclaim'd,

" The trying hour is come! I know yon voice!
 " It is the shout of Danes! some traitor's tongue
 " Hath told them our retreat, and they are now 225
 " Hastening to meet us. We have lost our King,
 " But not our courage." Each his sword display'd,
 And clash'd his shield, and felt the fix'd resolve
 To die or triumph. Wistfully they look'd
 And silent, when they saw the spies approach, 230
 Who cried, "The King! he comes, our Monarch comes!"
 Forth, with wild ecstasies, they sped, whilst shouts
 Rang through the tranquil sky.

ALFRED beheld

His well known friends, and saw their glist'ning eyes
 Speak clear of exultation. Glad at heart, 235
 He would have greeted each, embraced them all,
 But all had equal claims, and where to turn
 He knew not, pond'ring, still. So feels the man
 Who after wearying toil, hath reach'd at length
 Some lofty summit, from whose brow, his eye 240
 Roams o'er the subject plains; tho' charm'd with all,
 Yet gazing idly, doubtful where to fix
 His ravish'd sight, on distant hills or meads,
 Or woody vale, or rill, slow-gliding down
 The mountain's side, for all is beautiful. 245
 ALFRED prepared to speak, but yet the shouts—
 " Long live the King" confused, articulate sounds;
 So on he pass'd, surrounded by a host
 Of loud-rejoicing subjects. Now the King
 Approach'd the citadel, and from the bank, 250

High-heap'd that belted it, addressed his troops.

“ Saxons and friends beloved ! you, thus to meet,
“ After short absence, in some common time
“ Would yield me pleasure, but to see you now,
“ In this good hour, unconquer'd and prepared 255
“ To serve your country, well deserves the meed
“ I best can give—brave men, receive my thanks !
“ When last we parted, many heavy cares
“ Prey'd on my sinking heart, but since that time
“ My woes are doubled ! She whom I adored— 260
“ Your Queen—ALSWITHA, now, no longer lives !—
“ The Danes have murder'd her.”

The rising wind,

That at that instant swept across the trees—
Their topmost branches, spreading more and more,
Till every limb, both far and near, obey'd 265
The gentle impulse, seem'd to imitate
The murmur that at first around the King
Rose in slow-moving sounds, then spread itself
Till every Saxon heard the doleful news.

ALFRED again : “ If ever man endured 270
“ Perplexities and sore disquietude,
“ That man am I ! I, for ALSWITHA feel,
“ For you my friends, your children yet unborn ;
“ Hence, learn of me your Monarch.—Late, I saw
“ My countless injuries, and felt despair 275
“ Gnaw at my heart, but now, when deeper wrongs

" Have press'd me down, my soul, elastic, spurns
 " Its feeble trammels, and to action calls
 " Its firm and latent powers. A little grief
 " Hearts may o'erwhelm, when ills of bolder sort 280
 " Meet due resistance—such has been my lot.
 " This is my resolution. I am come
 " To dare again the war, to lead you forth
 " To battle, and, I trust, to victory.
 " Now is the hour, when we must all arise 285
 " And bid distrust, stand off! despair, avaunt!
 " And learn that courage arm'd in freedom's cause
 " No barrier knows. Let us review the past,
 " Survey the future, know how much depends
 " On these our resolutions, and the path 290
 " We now may tread. Think, oh ye list'ning host!
 " How many injured spirits round us throng,
 " And urge us to the fight! how many tongues,
 " Of children and of mothers, wives and friends,
 " Plead at the throne of justice, for our cause, 295
 " And us their brave defenders! Think again
 " Of future generations, who shall feel
 " The blaze of liberty, or eat the bread
 " Of anguish and subjection."

Louder yet,
 Sounded through all the air, the general shout, 300
 " Long live our Monarch! Death or Victory!"
 When thus again the King:

" I know too well
 " What Saxon heart is made of, to suspect

" Your resolution, bold and gallant men! 305
" Yet, know that courage, courage good and true,
" Thinks deep, and, from a view dispassionate,
" Looks all around, in silence calculates
" Each possibility, then calmly plans
" What best may serve its purpose, and beholds 310
" The penalty of failure undismay'd:
" This you have done, and Heaven will prosper you.

" Disasterous news prevails! IVAR the Dane
" On Saxon soil hath landed, with new hordes
" Bent on our utter ruin. Undismay'd 315
" I heard the tidings, for it rous'd my heart,
" From transient lethargy, and from mine eyes
" Tore the thick philm. I then beheld this truth
" Plain and most manifest, that nothing then
" Could save us, but our courage, and the smiles 320
" Of Him who smiles on courage, when the cause,
" Like ours, is just.

" Soon as to-morrow's sun
" Illumes the east, shake off your drowsiness,
" And to your friends, far off, present yourselves;
" Warn them to join our standard, each who loves 325
" Or home or freedom. Tell them with a voice
" Of solemn warning, if they now should fail,
" And terror seize them, Hope itself is gone,
" And we must hence, crouch at the conqueror's feet."

Each Chieftain loud exclaim'd, " Not so, oh King!

“ Nor at to-morrow’s dawn will we depart
“ To rouse thy people, we will, undismay’d,
“ This instant leave thee. Yonder silver orb
“ Shall light our steps, and many a gallant man
“ Soon croud around thy banner.” Forth they sped
To inspire again the Saxon’s fainting heart.

END OF BOOK VII.

ALFRED. BOOK VIII.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED's interview with a Hermit. Sigbert returns; his narration.

ERE yet the east told of approaching morn,
ALFRED arose, disturb'd with many cares:
He knew the wrath of IVAR, and the deeds
His hands might do, ere Saxon could oppose.
He thought upon ALSWITHA. Stillness mark'd 5
The scene around him, when he left the fort,
And wander'd through the forest, till he came
To a green plat, o'ercanopied with trees
Whose thick umbrageous limbs half hid the light,
Approaching slow. This, said the troubled King, 10
" Shall be my altar." When he pour'd the prayer.

" Maker of all around, of heaven and earth !
" Altho' the angelic host may not endure
" Thy majesty, each suppliant Thou wilt hear
" That with a contrite heart approacheth thee. 15
" In this last struggle for my country's rights,

“ Grant me success! But as Thine eye, beneath
“ Futurity’s dark veil, pierces and sees
“ The end from the beginning, thou alone
“ Know’st what is best for man —Thy will be done!

“ If, for wise ends, to me inscrutable,
“ Thou seest it right that I no more should wear
“ My father’s crown—I would believe it right!
“ Yet, as thy word encourageth weak man,
“ To tell his wants to Thee, and supplicate 25
“ For food and raiment, peace and every good,—
“ I would implore most fervently, Thine aid,
“ Almighty Father! Now am I prepared
“ To raise the sword, and may I never raise
“ That scourge of human kind, but in the cause 30
“ Of life and liberty, when I can ask,
“ As I this moment do, Thy blessing on it.
“ And if hereafter, in some happier time,
“ These perils over, Thou should’st fix again
“ My throne in steadfastness—may Royalty 35
“ Change not my heart, my gratitude to Thee,
“ Nor blind my mind to truth. May life appear
“ What now it does, a shadow, a short tale,
“ The dream of morn, a fleeting summer cloud,
“ Fair to behold, but whose stability 40
“ Changeth beneath the sight. May I aspire
“ E’en then to serve my Maker. May I learn
“ To love my subjects—love my fellow-kind—
“ To do all good, and know that I was made,

" Not for parade and ornament, a King, 45
" But for a great example, so shall years
" Far distant bless me, and Thy smiles at last
" Crown this my mortal life."

The King now roam'd

Far through the tangled trees; for images,
Succeeding fast, had with their rapid speed 50
So held his mind, that he had wander'd on
To the remotest boundary of the wood,
Unknowing, when he stopp'd, and looking round
Beheld a man, who in the vale of years
Had travelled far. A long grey beard he had, 55
A garment loose about his body hung,
And in his hand feebly he held a staff.
A look more free from all created cares
No eye had seen.

ALFRED approach'd and said;

" Pardon me, Father! whither art thou bound, 60
" Thus early?" " Son," the old man cried, " thy words
" Come from an honest tongue, tho' my dim sight
" But half perceives thee. Whither art thou bound?
" For this lone track along the forest's verge
" My feet have worn, and I have seldom seen 65
" The welcome stranger. May I ask the cause
" Of thy appearance, at this early hour,
" When the new sun scarce tinges the high hill?"

ALFRED replied: " Good father I am one
" Whose heart is sad, and I have wandered here, 70

" From far, to ease the melancholy pang
" That goads my bosom. May I now inquire
" Who thou art, with a countenance so mild,
" And so commanding in a place like this?"

The old man answer'd, " I a Hermit am, 75
" Whose path this is at night and early morn,
" When, happy, the birds sing, and I can feel
" That there is life abroad, tho' in my heart
" I feel it for another; for I now
" Creep where I once have bounded, and shall soon 80
" Cease e'en to creep, for old age comes apace,
" And I with this good staff move feebly, yet,
" I dread it not, for in my early days
" I walk'd with wisdom."

" Father," ALFRED cried, 85
" It is a goodly thing to walk like thee
" With wisdom, but to know what wisdom is,
" Sometimes is hard, what guide is thine, old man?"

The hermit answered, " Son, I love to hear
" Such questions asked, for to inquire the way
" That leads to truth, when in a world like ours 90
" Shews a right spirit. Son, my guide was this—
" The word of God, which understood and felt,
" Both in the head and heart, ever promotes
" That quiet contemplation of all round,
" Wisdom loves best—that first of earthly gifts— 95

" A peaceful conscience. I have tasted oft
 " Of troubles, and endured such cares as seem'd
 " Too hard for man; but, I o'ercame them all
 " By trust in Heaven; and here at length I am,
 " Still hoping, not forgotten, and about 100
 " To change my mortal garb, for I am old."

" Father!" the King replied, " no common words
 " Seem thine, and, of experience, thou hast gain'd
 " By deep researches, and communing oft
 " With Saints and highest Heaven, I would partake."

The hermit answered, " Cheerfully I grant
 " Thy wish, and may my words hereafter rise,
 " In some still moment, and bestow on thee
 " A portion of that joy which I have felt
 " From the same recollection—This the sum 110
 " Of fourscore years, and this the best advice
 " An aged man can give.

" A prize is thine,
 " Known chiefly by its want, for thou hast youth
 " And health before thee, let it not pass by,
 " Unwelcom'd, unimproved. I tell thee, Son! 115
 " This is true wisdom,—so through earth to walk,—
 " This transitory state, as to secure
 " The joys which for His servants, God hath heaped
 " In Heaven above. That world of mysteries—
 " The human mind—semblance of Deity, 120
 " On purity, alone, can rest itself

“ Contented, conscious of its origin,
“ Which mocks the lofty things that man calls great,
“ Soaring above them. Where is he whose heart,
“ Blest with created good, can calmly say, 125
“ I ask no more.” Can wealth or honors yield
“ Abiding happiness? Can splendor sooth
“ The craving appetite that asks for bread
“ Earth never granted? Can the scepter’d King,
“ Stretch’d on the couch of state, whose anxious brow
“ Laurels intwine, whilst all soft melodies
“ Glide through the air—can he this blessing boast?
“ Can these th’ immortal mind lull to repose?”

The hermit thus continued, “ Hear me, son!

“ If the long catalogue of earthly joys 135
“ Fail to support the mind, which toils beneath
“ Its proudest blessings, and endures them all
“ Rather than owns their worth; what is there here,
“ Man may call good?—Virtue alone, my son!
“ This only Heaven approves; this buoys the mind
“ Above life’s storms, and gives that lofty port,—
“ That dignified humility, just men
“ Alone possess, which makes them cast an eye
“ Over this state, to the far better land,
“ Where all shall dwell, who look’d to God, and walk’d
“ Unspotted through the world—leaning on him.
“ Let those declare the extent of earthly power
“ To stay the mind, whose restless hearts have sought
“ Tranquillity in all created good,

" But found it not: tho' disappointed, still, 150
" Grasping at shadows, vainly, seeking rest,
" Yet, like the troubled ocean, to and fro
" Toss'd by perpetual storms; striving to fill
" That aching void within, which none will do,
" Whate'er their boast of potent antidotes 155
" Till they have trusted in the word of life,
" And learn'd to say, My Father and My God!
" Then shall the hour, that calls them hence, be peace.
" A very bitter thing it is to view
" In Death an enemy, to feel disease, 160
" Incurable, slow spreading, or old age
" Creep on, and find no consolations kind,
" Smooth the rough way, when at life's precipice!

" Mind not thy cares, if cares thou hast, young man!
" They are the doom of mortals, and approach 165
" Not of themselves, but are the ministers
" Of Him who loves his creatures, and appoints
" These his best means to do them benefits.
" Yet, one thing heed! Grieve not that God, who made
" Man in his image and appointed him, 170
" But for his own perverseness, to enjoy
" Felicity hereafter, with the host
" Of saint and seraphim—this ever fear!
" For there shall come a time to him who sins
" Against the light within him, when his heart 175
" Shall loathe all good, and with abhorrence view
" The flower he may not touch, which to his mind

" Brings hateful recollections.—This, my son!
" I have lived long to know, it was my joy
" In youth, and now my locks are grey, it yields 180
" Full consolation."

" Thank thee !" cried the King,
" Father, I thank thee! precious are thy words
" And on a mind so chasten'd, may I think
" When far away. There are important calls
" Which need my service; but again I trust 185
" To see and hear thee. Father, now farewell!"
" Farewell my son," the hermit said, and both
Turn'd with a mutual prayer to seek their homes.

The King now hasten'd to the distant fort
More confident and calm. He saw the gate 190
And enter'd in, whilst every Saxon's eye
Glisten'd with rapture; but a settled gloom
Mark'd his contemplant brow, and if he smiled,
His features quick return'd to their first state;
As the tall reed upon the mountain top, 195
Which, when the breeze sweeps over it, reclines,
To mount again.

He thought of SIGBERT now,
And his long absence; every secret hope,
That yet ALSWITHA lived, forsook his heart;
And he was sad and silent! When a noise 200
Came from without, and as he rais'd his ear,
SIGBERT, to his astonishment, appeared!

"I need not ask the news," ALFRED exclaim'd;
"I see thy face! but Heaven endue my mind
"With strength to bear its burden. Speak thee on!
"And tell thy tale howe'er calamitous."

SIGBERT replied, "Oh best of Kings, I bring
"Poor tidings for thee! Would that I were dead!
"For to behold thy countenance, to me,
"Is worse than death."

ALFRED look'd up and said,
"Thou dost mistake me, SIGBERT! I can bear
"All that thou hast to say. Now let me know
"The worst! for not to know might try indeed
"My resolution."

SIGBERT spake: "Oh King,
"Pardon my failure! little have I learn'd 215
"Of thy good Queen ALSWITHA." "Hast thou heard
"Aught of her," cried the King. SIGBERT replied
"Something I have obtain'd. Astonish'd hear!
"I have been made a prisoner! I have met
"GUTHRUM the danish chief, and but escaped
"To bear a threat to thee!"

"How now," replied
ALFRED uprising. "Dost thou mock thy King?
"But if thy mind be serious, tell thy tale!
"And tho' I speak to thee, answer me not
"Till thou hast ended."

SIGBERT thus began:
"Leaving the grove where last I saw my King, 225
"Full many an hour I wandered, and a man

“ Met not these eyes, save one poor cottager,
“ That left his home to 'scape the Danes, who spread
“ Terror around. Now night was drawing near,
“ And in the dim horison, I could see 230
“ Surrounding fires—the Danes, whose brands destroy'd
“ Thy subject's habitations. Through my frame,
“ Crept horror, and descending from a hill
“ Where the bleak north-wind blew, I saw a pile,—
“ What once had been an Abbey, now o'ergrown 235
“ With moss and ivy. To the spot I hied
“ For nightly shelter. As I entered in
“ I heard a scream, and looking round, beheld
“ A woman flying! Fast I followed her,
“ And bade her answer, if she aught had heard 240
“ Of one, who from the raging fires escaped
“ When Glastonbury fell. A female, one,
“ Unknown, but ALFRED'S Queen. I further said
“ That thou had'st sent me to inquire her fate
“ And warn'd her to speak true. The woman look'd
“ Wild, and o'erpower'd with something at her heart;
“ When thus she cried: Good warrior, I have heard
“ A rumour that ALSWITHA lives, but, more,
“ I must not tell thee—Lead me to the King!
“ To him alone will I my tale declare. 245

“ Pleas'd with the dawn of hope, I eager cried ;
“ Before to-morrow's sun, thou shalt behold
“ ALFRED our King! And as we journey'd on
“ To seek thee here —Oh miserableman!

" We saw the Danes, an army led by one, 250
" Old, but most fierce to look at, GUTHRUM named.
" And soon the host drew near. Needless to tell
" All that was talk'd and threaten'd, 'tis enough
" To say that like a Saxon, undismay'd,
" I saw my fate, deem'd sure, and that I then 255
" Pledg'd my master's cause. Full plain he saw
" I fear'd him not, and when he drew his sword
" To slay me, something check'd his hand; he cried,
" Rise, prostrate Saxon! I will spare thy life—
" Convey this message to thy haughty King." 260

" What were his words?" ALFRED exclaim'd, "Telleach!"
" If thou would'st have indeed his very words,
" By Christian faith, this was the lofty taunt:

" Imperious Saxon! go, inform thy King
" One certain fate awaits him. Tell him I
" GUTHRUM the danish chief, am hastening now
" To Kenwith, where the trembling ODDUNE lies,
" And starves for succour; whilst around the walls
" HUBBA, my Prince encamps. I thither go
" To vanquish that proud Saxon, and to dogs
" His carcass cast, when by the gods on high
" By ODIN, THOR and FREYA, and the race
" Of matchless deities, who throng the halls
" Of Valhall, we will hunt thy Monarch out,
" And if this land contain him, whether hid
" In glen or cavern, wood or mountain bare,

" These swords shall find, and these exultant eyes
" Gaze on his mangled corse. Tell thou thy King
" His doom is certain! Let him call and pray
" To the great God thou servest, and behold 280
" Whether his might can aid, when Danes approach
" Thy Monarch's hiding-place. His voice may sound
" Loud and more loud, but he shall know how vain,
" When Denmark's warriors claim their fated prey."

When, with a zeal, such as the prophets felt, 285
And holy men of old, ALFRED replied,
" My God hath given the stars their course and fix'd
" The bounds of ocean, when he raves, and dares
" All but Omnipotence, and that same God
" Will to my bitter foes—the Danes, appoint 290
" A bound impassable! They shall not rule!
" They shall not ODDUNE slay! They shall not yet,
" Spoil to the uttermost this goodly land—
" For there is one in Heaven!—Now tell thy tale!"

SIGBERT again: " I thank'd the Dane and said, 295/
" But let this woman pass! Thus he replied:
" Thy life I give thee, but, presumptuous man!
" Ask for no more, or, by the powers above,
" Here shalt thou lie, a spectacle, to tell
" What rashness merits." Madness had it been 300
" For SIGBERT to contend, so with the Dane
" She pass'd away."

ALFRED distracted cried;

" Didst thou receive the hope that yet she lived?
 " Oh no! delusive thought! Can it be true? —
 " This hard uncertainty, these doubts and fears 305
 " Alternate, jarring, so consume my heart,
 " That it were merciful to know indeed
 " That she were dead! " What are my words? away,
 " Thou thought abhorrent!—She is gone, who knew
 " Tidings of her I honor!" ALFRED now 310
 Stood motionless, when SIGBERT thus again:

" One thing had near escaped me; ere she pass'd,—
 " The woman,—from her neck she took these pearls,
 " And to me said, " If in hereafter times
 " Thou should'st address, him who remembers these,
 " Declare, she who possess'd them, now endures
 " Sorrows and hard captivity." When SIGBERT placed
 " The pearls before his Monarch, which he saw,
 " And sudden started back! Feebly he cried—
 " That woman was ALSWITHA!"

SIGBERT stood, 320

Whilst twenty times the crow might flap his wing,
 Silent in wild amazement.

Now to find

ALSWITHA lived, yet, by the hostile Dane
 Torn from his sight, a dark uncertain joy
 Gave to the King, like what he feels, who sails 325
 Upon some stormy sea, then on a rock
 Drives with impetuous force, and when at length
 The crag he climbs, finds to his bitter cost
 That he alone survives of all the crew.

“ALSWITHA!” cried the King, “I never more
“Shall see thee, or the music of thy voice
“Hear, and rejoice at!” ALFRED spake again:
“SIGBERT, declare as thou hast faith in Heaven
“What said the Dane, and what ALSWITHA said!
“Tell me each word!”

When SIGBERT forth began:
“In that disastrous hour, I little knew
“For whom I pleaded! Thus the Dane replied:
“Away with thee! “Saxon, thy words are vain!
“She shall become my counsellor; her words
“Have so impress’d my mind, that I desire 340
“To hear her further. (For ALSWITHA spake
“With most full confidence of that great God
“He dared defy, which made his sinews quake,
“His cheek turn pallid.) She shall go, he cried,
“And tell me of that God, the Spirit vast 345
“Which late she spake of, whom I may compare
“With ODIN and our gods. He further said,
“His soul was awed, that in her he beheld,
“A grace, a majesty—”

“Tell me no more!”
ALFRED exclaim’d, “but speak, what said the Queen—
“What were ALSWITHA’s words?”

SIGBERT replied,
“She answer’d thus, whilst the tear bathed her cheek:
“Oh warrior, let me go! nor thus oppress
“A poor weak woman. Didst thou know what calls
“Sound in mine ear, thou would’st regard my words

" And let me harmless pass; for I have one,
" Far off, a husband, who my absence mourns,
" And who would die, to hear that I was met
" By thee, oh Chieftain! and perforce convey'd,
" He knew not where."

ALFRED replied, " Most brave,
" This cheers me! now proceed!" SIGBERT again:
" The Dane thus spake, " Woman thou plead'st in vain,
" I never change! Thou hast no cause to fear!
" My name is GUTHRUM! Tedious thus to wait;
" Mount yonder steed! and at some future time, 365
" Again thou may'st return and seek thy home.
" What more she said, oh Prince! I must not tell;
" Thou canst not hear it." Cried the anxious King,
" Tell me each word! for never felt this heart
" More firm and more collected." SIGBERT said,
" These were her words :

" To talk of future hopes,
" Were vain indeed! I have no future hopes!
" The bird that for her young flies many a mile,
" And, glad, returns to seek them, but beholds
" Her treasure gone, her all, her little all 375
" Gone and no vestige left, feels such as I!
" For I am homeward bound, and many hopes
" Made my heart glad, but thou hast marr'd them all,
" And I am now, a poor lost woman, sunk
" In prostrate misery."

" I never saw 380
" Such looks! so many thoughts now strike my mind,

“ So many words she spake of tenderness,
“ That powers invisible must me have kept
“ From thought and recollection. To myself
“ Who near her stood, she cried, “ Thou yet art free!
“ One favour do I ask.” When, from her neck,
“ She took that string of pearls of which I spake,
“ And weeping bade me, If I e’er should meet,
“ The man who own’d them, of her, thus to say :

“ She loved her husband! mourn’d her infant child
“ Gone to his fathers. “ Tell him,” she exclaim’d,
“ If ere he see me living, he shall find
“ My heart still pure, and if, far off, I die,
“ To pity one, who with her latest breath
“ Call’d on her husband, and from Heaven implored
“ Blessings on him and his.”

ALFRED replied,
“ This is indeed too much! Leave me with night,
“ To-morrow I shall see thee !”

SIGBERT bow’d,
And from the presence of the King retired.

END OF BOOK VIII.

ALFRED. BOOK IX.

ARGUMENT.

CEOLRIC's return and narration; Consultation of Alfred with his Chiefs; Sigbert rebuked for the violence of his spirit.

SOON as the dawn appear'd, to ALFRED's door,
SIGBERT approach'd and enter'd. Pacing slow
He saw the King, who, wild of look, exclaim'd:
“SIGBERT, my plan is fix'd! This arm shall meet
“GUTHRUM the Dane! this sword contend for her” 5
“Whom he hath made a captive! I must first
“Rescue ALSWITHA, then revolve on plans
“For Britain's welfare.—No! I do mistake!
“My country first! Oh SIGBERT! in my mind
“Such jarring resolutions come and go, 10
“That I am now like one whom thought hath left,
“And manly fortitude.”

SIGBERT replied,

“Early this morn, a man approach'd our fort—
“A stranger, and inquired for thee; his name,
“CEOLRIC.” “What, CEOLRIC!” ALFRED cried, 15

" Bid him our presence seek." SIGBERT withdrew,
And soon CEOLRIC enter'd; when the King
Approach'd the cottager, and said, " My friend!
" I joy to see thee! Often have I thought,
" With deep solicitude, of many a toil, 20
" And peril unsuspected, thou might'st meet
" In this thy journey. Welcome here! but say,
" How doth good ODDUNE fare?"

CEOLRIC thus:
" I travelled on, oh King, from Ethelney,
" Cautious, and soon arrived where proudly rose 25
" The castle Kenwith.¹ On the shore it stands.
" Now to a neighbouring hill I sped, and found
" The encamped Danes at hand. As thus I watch'd,
" Trembling yet confident, I saw the foe
" March to the castle walls, with swords and bows, 30
" And the long spear, the ladder and the torch.
" They came beneath! I saw the assault commence!
" Then in my heart I shook and felt cold dews
" Start from my brow, and thought the hour was come,
" When ODDUNE and his gallant host must feel 35
" Death near at hand. I saw them mount the walls,
" But oh my joy! my thrilling ecstasy!
" When on the battlements, the Saxon arm
" Busiest appeared. And now the invading Danes
" Fell to the ground. I saw them fall, and seem'd 40
" With mine own arm to push them downward. Shouts

¹ See Note 7, Book IV.

" Rose from the ramparts, whilst the enemy

" In rage retired.

" The castle, well I saw,

" And on the topmost tower I mark'd a man,

" Looking methought for succour. Many an hour 45

" I watch'd him from the hill, and there he stood,

" Now gazing east, then west, and north, and south,

" Alternate; and when eve came on, I saw,

" Clear in the light horison—darkening slow,

" His head the latest object, looking still 50

" For hourly succour."

ALFRED loud exclaim'd,

" And he shall soon behold me—speak thee on!"

CEOLRIC spake:

" Now night was drawing near,

" And from the hill I hasten'd, whilst a thought,

" That made my brow look solemn, troubled me— 55

" I knew my danger, yet remembering well

" The import of thy charge, strove not to fear.

" From the high hill I mark'd a certain spot,

" Where, by the hand of time filled up, no mote

" Barr'd my approach to the tall battlements. 60

" This spot I safe attain'd! when from beneath,

" I look'd and feebly cried, " Lend me your aid,

" Good Saxons!" All was still. I then again

" Call'd louder, " aid me," but a certain dread

" So still'd my voice, that I could hardly hear 65

" Myself say, " aid me." Chilling blew the wind,

" The night was dark and stormy, and I stood,

" Trembling, whilst many fears assail'd my heart.
 " As pondering thus, I heard, some, drawing near,
 " And, by their speech, perceived that they were Danes!²
 " Close underneath the wall I stretch'd myself,
 " And, passing, heard them whisper, " We shall soon,
 " Conquer this stubborn Saxon, not a soul,
 " Shall live to tell what he endured, to save
 " This castle for his master. Tho' we fail'd 75
 " In the past day, when with full confidence
 " We dared the walls, yet that discomfiture,
 " Tho' hard to bear, shall on the second morn,
 " From this good time, when we the fight renew,
 " Inspire new ardour. At the next assault, 80
 " If we our purpose gain, there then shall need
 " No Valkyries³ to determine who shall fall,
 " For every Saxon's blood shall drench the ground!
 " This portion of the wall, shall next sustain
 " The danish onset." Toward the wall they strode,
 " And eyed it well. I thought they touch'd me! Still,
 " Lay I and trembled, when, a whizzing dart
 " Came from above! discover'd, fast they fled!
 " Rising, I cried, " Saxon! a friend is near."
 " When o'er the battlements one look'd and said, 90
 " What voice is that? Speak, or this iron lance

² The Saxons and Danes having descended from the same gothic origin, we may suppose a sufficient conformity in their language to understand each other.

³ Valkyries were the female ministers of Odin, who selected those who were to die in battle. They also attended the heroes in the halls of Valhalla. The names of two of them were Hrista and Mista.

" Shall pierce thee to the heart !" Earnest I cried,
" I am thy brother, Saxon ! stay thy hand,
" And listen to me !" then he stay'd his hand,
" And said, " Thy name !" I thus replied ; " I come
" With tidings, to thy Chieftain, from our King !"
" The Saxon answer'd, " Speed thee to the gate !"
" Unnoticed, I approach'd it ; he with joy
" Led me toward ODDUNE.
" Night was far advanced,
" And as the hall I enter'd, I beheld 100
" The Chieftain, and around him many a man
" Held in deep converse. ODDUNE thus began :
" Thy business stranger ?" Doubt me not, I said ;
" I bear a message from the King ! he look'd,
" And each around him, eager, and so still 105
" All seem'd at once, that I the sudden hush
" Felt in my heart, and every word I spake
" Seem'd to recoil upon myself. I cried ;
" ALFRED our King is safe ! He knows thy state,
" And soon, to thy relief, will hither come, 110
" Leading a host of men, resolved to die
" Or rescue thee, oh Chieftain ! ODDUNE cried,
" Withhold awhile ! and suddenly uprose ;
" His breath was labour'd, and he stalk'd along,—
" I never saw such strides, and such wild looks ! 115
" But soon he stopp'd, and said, " Thanks to our God !
" We shall not starve ! Now, stranger, speak again."
" I then declared all that thou bad'st me say,
" Telling thy fix'd resolve ; that Selwood's shade

“ Was the resort for Saxons, and that soon, 120

“ Kenwith should see the royal banner near.

“ When ODDUNE rose and shouted, “ We shall yet

“ Live to behold our King! right manfully

“ Will we defend these walls.” Such fearful joy

“ Sparkling in every eye, I oft have heard

“ Hath been, yet never saw ; for to my mind

“ They seem’d like ideots, laughing now aloud,

“ And to and fro, walking confused, then fix’d

“ And pondering with stern brow ; but soon I saw 130

“ It was excess of gladness, for tho’ wild,

“ They were most gentle. ODDUNE thus declared :

“ Friends, I partake your transport! Now our hearts

“ Beat high with exultation, but our joy

“ Prudence must temper, and the certainty, 135

“ That succour fast approaches, arm our minds

“ With deeper caution. Flee each to his post!

“ Instruct the centinels! Watch well from far

“ The little cloud of danger. Triumph soon

“ All shall partake!”

“ Turning to me he said, 140

“ I thank thee, stranger! Haste thee to the King!

“ Convey our gratulations, and assure

“ The best of Monarchs, nothing will we leave,

“ Undone to serve him, here, within these walls,

“ Or in hereafter times. Tell thou the King, 145

“ Our hearts are good ; tho’ many a pressing doubt

"Hath troubled us, one foe alone we fear'd,—
"The waster Famine! Tell him we rejoice
"To learn his resolution. Bid him hold
"No anxious cares for us, we yet have food 150
"For many days."

When ALFRED started up,
And cried, "For many days did ODDUNE say?—
"That many days provision he had left?
"Then is he safe! I yet shall see his face!
"Speak on!"

CEOLRIC answered: "I, the chief, 155
"Told of the hostile threats, which I had heard
"Beneath the walls, and of the coming charge
"He might expect from HUBBA, on the morn,
"Next to that coming. Me the warrior thank'd,
"With true and hearty zeal, when I retired, 160
"And through the gate escaping sought thee here."

ALFRED replied, "Brave man, receive my praise!
"A most important part hast thou perform'd,
"And I will well reward thee. Now return,
"Back to thy home. I do not tell thee yet 165
"My resolutions, but, to Ethelney
"Speed on, and wait my summons. Thou wilt know
"For what I send thee, when within thy cot
"Thou enterest, for a pearl is there, whose price,
"No words may name—but, guard it as thy life!" 170

CEOLRIC cried: "That I have served thy cause

" Gives me the pleasure which I fain would speak
" But cannot, my untutor'd words are few,
" Yet spring they from a heart, that thou may'st trust
" With all thou hast at Ethelney. Farewell!" 175

ALFRED now turn'd to SIGBERT, and inquired
With deep solicitude, how many men
Had reach'd the forest. Instant he arose,
Leaving the King, and soon return'd, and cried,
" Not thicker are the leaves amid this track 180
" Bewild'ring than appear the Saxon troops
" Who round our castle throng. On every side
" They crowd, and still appear new companies
" To hail their risen Monarch."

Now the King
Approach'd to greet them. On the bank he stood,
And would have spoken, but more vain the task,
Than his who strives to quell the stormy main
And to some distant mariner forewarn
Of fatal rock to which he onward drives.

He spake, but still the shouts " Long live the King!"
Rang through the air; and when awhile they ceased,
So solemn was the silence, and so loud
The deaffening noise that follow'd, that it seem'd
Like the deep calm, that o'er the western world
Strikes on the ear, when the fierce hurricane 195
Slow dies away, a little space, then sounds
With huger peals, and more exalted wrath,—

Roaring along the firmament. In vain
 The King essay'd to catch each transient pause;
 When, to the castle, back again he turn'd,— 200
 Calling his chiefs. They crowd around their Prince,
 Who thus address'd them.

“ Subjects and tried friends,
 “ I ask your counsel ! Joy it yields my heart
 “ To mark the gallant spirit that prevails
 “ Amid my people, and the firm resolves 205
 “ I see in you. I do not give you hopes
 “ Of sudden conquest, but if we support
 “ Our resolution, and confide in Him
 “ Who till this hour hath fed us and upheld;
 “ We yet shall prosper. Never was an hour 210
 “ That louder call'd for wisdom, or the aid
 “ Of heavenly guidance,—May those gifts be ours!
 “ The paths that now before us lie are dark,
 “ And which to follow, I desire to have
 “ Your counsel.”

One arose.—“ If I may dare 215
 “ Admonish thee, oh Monarch! I will speak
 “ The language of sincerity, though not,
 “ Perchance, of wisdom. This would I advise.—
 “ Down to the southern shore, let us advance
 “ With march precipitous, and there behold 220
 “ IVAR debark; (if haply that the foe
 “ Till then should hesitate;) which having seen,
 “ We forth may follow, and attack him, where,
 “ And how—best may appear. Subduing first

BOOK IX.

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" One half his army. But if we oppose, 225
 " And show ourselves prepared to meet the fight,
 " The wary Dane may leave this shore, and sail,
 " E'en to the castle Kenwith whose firm base
 " The waves of ocean lave."

Silence ensued.

When SIGBERT rose. " Since liberty is given, 230
 " And all are free to speak, I must declare
 " My opposition. Let us not depart
 " Down to the southern shore, but instant haste
 " To Kenwith, where the leaguer'd ODDUNE looks
 " For hourly succour, but if we depart 235
 " He long shall look in vain. My heart doth pant
 " To seek the danish army! Let us haste,
 " And HUBBA meet, that Chieftain, at whose name,
 " The babe upon its mother's breast turns pale,—
 " Feeling instinctive terror. Let us count 240
 " The moments till the fight, and when it comes,
 " Call to our standard, Havoc! bid each flower
 " And herb and lofty tree, all moisture scorn,
 " But danish blood, that soon shall flow so fast
 " And in such living torrents, that the rain 245
 " Awhile may stay itself, and nature wear
 " A garb of crimson."

Each in wonder look'd,

When ALFRED cried, " Your sentiments, oh Chiefs!
 " I wait to hear you." One arose and said.
 " What doth our King advise?" ALFRED thus spake :
 " Tidings have late arrived from Kenwith's towers,

" That ODDUNE fears not; nor doth want so press
 " Upon our brethren there, that we should yield,
 " Plans of high moment. This your King's advice.
 " Soon as the morrow dawns, let us depart, 255
 " Not to meet IVAR, but, to burn his fleet!—
 " To waste the danish navy! This perform'd,
 " God and our courage are our sole defence."

The instant ALFRED ended, every Chief,
 Approved his words, not with the common forms 260
 Of placid acceptation, but, like men
 Who know their lives and welfare jointly hang
 On that which they determine.

ALFRED now

Bade for the approaching morn his Chiefs prepare,
 When, calling SIGBERT, thus, alone, he spake: 265

" Pardon me, SIGBERT! I am one who loves,
 " The heart that meditates on truth, the tongue
 " That dares declare it. Much I prize thy worth,
 " And many services, and still I trust
 " To make thee recompence; yet, I must name 270
 " The thing disliked, tho' in my dearest friend.
 " Thy soul is fill'd with hatred and blind wrath,—
 " A Christian cannot hate! We all are taught
 " By Him, who never err'd—to pity those
 " We cannot love—e'en our worst enemies. 275
 " SIGBERT, thy mind is poison'd, thou dost thirst,
 " With most foul appetite, for danish blood,—
 " Not for the good it yields thee, but to please

" Thy rooted hatred, and uncurb'd revenge.
 " Thy wrongs are great! My wrongs are manifold!
 " But let us not exclude that holy light,—
 " Truth from our minds. Have not the Danes some wrongs
 " To vex their spirits? Was it not a Prince
 " Of Britain, that with dastard cruelty
 " Murder'd the danish King?⁴—the very sire 285
 " Of these our fierce invaders? Let this thought,
 " Nor stay our arm in fight, but, in the hour
 " Of triumph, calm our wrath. The Danes are men,
 " And tho' they scorn the suppliant's cry, our faith
 " Hath taught us better.

" What I now declare 290
 " Springs not from sudden anger, but is learn'd,
 " From reason, and that sacred book, whose page,
 " Infallible, all should alike obey.—
 " SIGBERT, with me thou shalt not wage the war!⁵
 " Thou hast profess'd thyself, singled of Heaven 295
 " To bear glad tidings, and good-will to men!—
 " How cam'st thou by that garb? A calling thine,
 " When in faith chosen, and with zeal fulfilled—
 " Most dignified, and first of human kind!
 " SIGBERT, henceforth respect thy character!" 300

⁴ See Note 2, Book I.

⁵ The ministers of religion among the Anglo-Saxons were exempted from military services, and forbidden the use of arms, that they might not be diverted from a constant attention to the duties of their sacred function.

SIGBERT astonish'd heard. His face now glow'd,
Now pale appear'd, and in his mind, there seem'd
Conflicting passions. Thus he spake: "Oh King!
" Dost thou indeed declare, that I must leave
" My sword and my good armour, shun the fight, 305
" And never, from this moment, more rejoice
" O'er vanquish'd Dane?" Silent, he stood awhile,
Then thus again. " Monarch, thy words are just!
" They well accord with something at my heart,—
" That still small voice, which in the silent hour 310
" Of thought and meditation, well approves
" Thy doctrine! But, my all! each friend I loved,
" These Danes have spoil'd me of! and shall I crouch
" In low, base cowardice, and court the foe
" To murder, unresisted?—see the Danes, 315
" Thick as the solar ray, scatter around,
" All plagues, yet sheath my sword? My very soul
" Revolts at these thy words! I cannot check
" This loathing of all mercy! I must live,
" In fix'd and unextinguishable hate.— 320
" Screen not a soul! Laugh at their dying yells!
" And when with shrinking heart they look for death,
" Spare them with savage mercy to endure
" New tortures, and unheard-of agonies!"

ALFRED replied, in slow and solemn tone, 325
" Thou knowest not what spirit thou art of!
" Thy many wrongs have so disturb'd thy thoughts,

- " So warm'd thy faculties, that thou dost see
" Plain things confused. SIGBERT, before thee lie
" Two paths, declare thy choice! for they are both,
" Opposed, distinct, and incompatible!—
" Be thou the man of God, resign the thought
" Avenging, and put on that ornament—
" A meek and quiet spirit; show thyself
" Prepared to teach, by having first been taught; 335
" Or, else, renounce thy character! throw off
" The hypocrite! confess thyself the slave
" Of hate, and all the passions, fierce and blind,
" Which nature groans beneath; then wield thy sword,
" Not for the end, but for the thirst of blood, 340
" Unqualified, thy heart doth doat upon!
" This thou may'st do, but, know the recompence!
" It is the scorn of men, the curse of God!
" In me it is most meet, thus to declare,
" For Heaven hath rais'd me up, howe'er unfit, 345
" To govern this his people; and to see
" His teachers pure; and never will I view
" Such men as thou, the ministers of peace.—
" Discard the priesthood! or, renounce the sword!"

- In strange amaze SIGBERT look'd up and cried, 350
" With deep conviction do thy words come here!
" I cannot wield the sword, and still retain
" The spirit Heaven approves; yet do I feel
" Hatred so deeply fix'd, and in my heart
" Such cravings, not to be subdued by words,— 355

"That I must grasp the sword!"

ALFRED replied,

"I hear thy resolution! I have well

"Discharged my conscience. Now will I appoint

"Station of trust, where thou may'st hence display

"Due courage and promote thy country's weal. 360

"Forth for the march prepare! The hour draws on,

"When Denmark's fleet, shall stream with Britain's fires."

END OF BOOK IX.

ALFRED. BOOK X.

ARGUMENT.

THE burning of the Danish Fleet.

BEFORE the morn arrived, SIGBERT uprose
With thought distracted. Through the silent hours
Of the past night he lay, revolving oft
On ALFRED's words and gestures, that disturb'd
His inmost soul. Each sentence which he spake 5
Impress'd his mind with such strong characters
That oft he half forgot them, and the cares
Of late so terrible, seem'd in oblivion lost:
Then, like some tide or ocean long embank'd
That bursts its barriers—fierce—impetuous, 10
Casting its world of waters o'er the land,
In SIGBERT's feverish mind, the Monarch's words,
Resistless enter'd, scorning the weak bound
Of human will.

Now ALFRED's words seem'd harsh,
And with resentment SIGBERT view'd them o'er, 15

'Till something came and gently in his ear
 Whisper'd of truth, and of the purity
 Which christian priest became. He thought again
 Of what his mind once was, the seat of peace
 And lowliness, that could respect at eve, 20
 And morn, that precept, "love thine enemies."
 And say with fervent spirit, "If there be
 Those who despite me—pardon them, oh Lord!
 But in his heart he fear'd that time was gone.

Whilst musing thus, the sudden thought arose 25
 Of many a friend gone down to death, like fruit
 Untimely cast to earth. He felt a glow
 Pervade his cheek, and as he look'd to Heaven
 And cried, "Oh righteous God, lend me thy fires,
 "That I may blast these Danes—" turning, he saw
 ALFRED, beholding! SIGBERT's mind then felt
 As tho' some great divinity were nigh,
 Like him, who sleeps on earth, and when the night
 Draws near, awakes, and sees the full-orb'd moon
 Upon his face gazing in quietness. 35

The King exclaim'd, "SIGBERT, arouse the troops!
 "The hour is come, and we must buckle on
 "Our batter'd armour, seize again the sword,
 "Direct the missive weapon, and implore
 "The aid of God on this our last attempt." 40

Like as the lark, upon an April morn

That leaves his nest, whilst yet the sun is hid,
 And nature dim and silent, as his voice
 Rouses the feather'd tribe, and makes the air
 Ring with their orisons; so at the voice 45
 Of ALFRED, from their tents outpour'd his troops
 In exultations, and wild rhapsodies —
 Greeting their Monarch; who address'd them thus :

“ Subjects, I joy to see you! When the light
 “ First streaks the east, we know that morn is nigh, 50
 “ And now your hearts are roused, I see at hand
 “ The first faint dawn of our prosperity.
 “ To burn the danish fleet is our design
 “ Not to provoke the fight. Five hundred men
 “ Alone I take. The rest, till we return, 55
 “ Prepare the means of warfare.” Each aspired
 “ To be the favour'd man.

The appointment made;

ALFRED inquired, if all to meet the event
 Felt their hearts ready? Each his sword uprais'd
 And clash'd his shield. When ALFRED cried, “Oh God,
 “ Thou art our confidence!” and onward march'd.

Thoughts of approaching scenes, now o'er their brow
 Cast a solemnity. They moved along,
 Silent, but that the steady tread of feet,
 Heard ever, sounded like that gushing noise 65
 Made by some bark upon the ocean wide,
 In calm and quiet weather, when the air

Gives but one sound—the parting of the waves.

Long time they march'd, and pleasant was the sight,
When passing through the towns and villages, 70
Shadows of what they were, now fallen or burnt,
To see the aged by the road-way side,
The cripple and the fatherless, the maim'd,
The mother and her children, stand to bless,
As to the wars they pass'd their gallant King, 75
And his brave followers. ALFRED one beheld,—
A feeble woman, at her cot she stood,
And with loud benedictions, as he pass'd,
Call'd on the saints to bless him; when he stopp'd,
And her address'd. “Woman! thy speech is loud,
“And thou dost look like one, whose heart has known,
“No common sorrows. What has been thy lot?”

Upon the borders of a forest deep
Her cottage stood, of turf and osiers made,
And under the huge trees that shaded it 85
The Saxon army stood. At ALFRED's words,
The woman rais'd her voice and cried:

“Oh King!

“My lot is hard indeed, for I am doom'd,
“To live, when all my friends are dead, all slain,
“Husband and neighbours! I had once five sons 90
“Comely and good,—the comfort of my age,
“But they are kill'd! the Danes, thine enemies,
“Have slain them! and I, too, shall share their fate,

- " Unless thou vanquish.—Heaven defend thy cause!
 " I know how little life can offer me, 95
 " And feel, each day, some monitor of death;
 " Yet, as my years increase, a growing love
 " Of life increases, for my little cot
 " Still has its charms for me; and tho' my limbs
 " Tremble at every breath, and I, alone, 100
 " Survive, my heart still clings to its loved home.
 " A wretched thing it is for age like mine
 " To lose its recollection, and at eve
 " To know my sons are dead, and then at morn
 " For them prepare my cates, and anxious look, 110
 " To see them enter my low cottage door,
 " 'Till memory comes. But tho' I know them gone,
 " Fondly I hope 'gainst hope, ah vain desire!
 " I never more shall see them, they are dead!"

The King was answering, when he look'd and saw
 Upon a neighbouring hill, a warrior host,
 Like Danes! He, turning, thus address'd his troops:
 " Silence, the enemy!" When every sound,
 Save of the leaves that from the passing breeze
 Quiver'd and stopp'd alternate, ceas'd at once. 115
 The King beheld, and still more certainly,
 It seem'd the danish army. To a tree,
 That stood beside, SIGBERT approach'd and climb'd,
 And hastening down, pronounced, "Thy doubts were just,
 " It is the enemy!" ALFRED replied, 120
 " This is the chief, IVAR, of whom we heard."

When, turning to the woman, thus he spake:

“ But for thy words, good woman ! but to hear
 “ Thy melancholy story, I had pass’d
 “ The confines of this wood, and met perchance 125
 “ The unexpected fight—perchance defeat !
 “ So Providence ordains, that little things
 “ Should govern great ones ! Hear thy Monarch’s words !
 “ That thou hast lost thy friends, and here sustain’st
 “ A miserable life upon the verge 130
 “ Of this great forest, far from human kind,
 “ I mourn ! upon some future day, thou yet
 “ May’st hear from ALFRED. Mother, now farewell !
 “ Thy friend be God ! ”

The woman look’d to Heaven,
 But ere her speech return’d, still through the wood
 Again the King proceeded, and his troops
 Fast follow’d him.

Patient they toil’d along
 ‘Till evening shadows fell, and night o’ercast
 The canopy of Heaven. Now all, their tents,
 Spread, and in slumber rested.

On a hill 140
 They pass’d the night, and as the morning dawn’d,
 They look’d upon the ocean and beheld
 The hostile navy¹ stretch’d along the strand !

¹ In the eighth century the piratical fleets of the Danes were inconsiderable; but in the following century they greatly increased, and it was not uncommon at this time for expeditions to consist of seven hundred vessels. The smallest being a kind of twelve-oared bark, and the largest holding about one hundred and twenty men.

When, turning to his forces, ALFRED cried ;
 “ Behold yon barks, that hither brought the Danes
 “ To waste this country and ourselves to hold
 “ In chains and slav’ry ! Yonder view the ships
 “ That are our greatest foes, yet, may be made
 “ Our greatest friends.—But, more of this when peace
 “ Shall bless our isle !² Hear me, ye gallant men !
 “ Since the sad hour when Cyppanham’s massy gates³
 “ Received the Danes, and saw our vanquish’d arms ;
 “ A fearful apprehension hath o’erpower’d
 “ The Saxon mind, and we half welcom’d death,—
 “ Yet, now is hope ! This I command, ere night
 “ With cautious step to reach yon spacious wood,
 “ Skirting the shore ; and when the firmament
 “ Clouds have o’ercast, to sally thence unseen
 “ And fire the danish fleet.” All, joyful, heard.

Now down the hill they pass’d, and soon approach’d
 The woody covert, when each man around

² “ There can be no question, that the first english monarchs, Egbert, Ethelwulph, and his three eldest sons, who were all cruelly harassed by the Danes, were very sensible of the disadvantages they laboured under, for want of a sufficient fleet to meet the enemy at sea ; and that they were earnestly desirous of supplying that defect. But there is nothing in the world more difficult than to restore a naval power when it is fallen into decay, in a country where there is little foreign trade, to furnish ships, and to be a nursery for seamen ; and in the face of enemies who are masters of the sea. To an ordinary genius this must appear impracticable. What admiration then is justly due to that extraordinary prince who not only attempted, but accomplished, that difficult undertaking ; who raised a mighty naval power, almost out of nothing, revived foreign trade, and wrested the dominion of the seas out of the hands of the insulting Danes ? This was the great ALFRED, who presents himself in so many amiable points of view, to one who studies the Anglo-Saxon history, that it is impossible not to contract the fondest and most enthusiastic admiration of his character.”

³ See Note 5, Book II.

Oft counted o'er his darts, and twang'd his bow,
 And eager form'd the brand, and through the air,
 At insubstantial foes, wielded his sword,
 'Till night o'ercast the scene. When ALFRED thus:

“ Saxons, the hour is come!—Tho' on that fleet
 “ Devouring flames must light, yet, bear in mind,
 “ A gallant soldier, ever spares the foe
 “ That asks for mercy. Be ye slack to shed
 “ One drop of blood, and when you see the hand 170
 “ Of supplication, think not of the wrongs,
 “ Yourself, your friends, your country may have borne,
 “ But think—a fellow creature asks for life!

“ It seems most wise, ere to the beach we speed,
 “ To send some trusty spy to look around 175
 “ And learn what forces yet protect the fleet.
 “ SIGBERT, I know thy zeal!” SIGBERT approach'd
 And cried, “ Oh Monarch, for this further proof
 “ Of thy good confidence, thankful, my heart;
 “ And like a subject true will I perform 180
 “ This enterprise.” He bow'd and left the King.

Now from the neighbouring beach SIGBERT return'd
 And cried, “ Sovereign, the glorious prize is ours!
 “ There is no foe—no man to meet our swords,
 “ But there are women, numberless—the wives 185
 “ Of these our fierce invaders.”

ALFRED heard,

Nor longer paus'd whether to show them mercy
 Than doth the running brook which path to take
 When stones its course oppose. Aloud he cried,
 "Shout, oh my people! If the brave behold 190
 "Where to display their bravery, fervent joy
 "Makes their hearts glad. These women we will spare!
 "We will do justice to ourselves! our swords
 "On men war only. Sad the destiny
 "That prompts the warrior's deeds, but when he finds
 "A cheap and bloodless victory, unforeseen;
 "'Tis to his heart, like some well-water'd spot,
 "Verdant and fair, 'mid Lybia's burning sands
 "To the parch'd trav'ler."

Scarce had ALFRED said,
 When each replied, "Spare, spare the weak! our swords
 "Must meet resistance, victory else were shame!"
 Then, ushering from the wood, they sought the fleet.

High over head, resplendent shone the moon;
 Whilst through Heaven's firmament stillness prevail'd,
 Save where the fitful blast, made the trees rock 205
 And loud and surlily their huge limbs scream.

Now they approach'd the strand when ALFRED look'd
 Toward a near hill, and saw two men, with speed,
 Escaping, "Those are enemies," he cried!
 "From hence they flee, bearing to distant Danes 210
 "Tidings of us. SIGBERT, behold the foe!
 "Take with thee whom thou wilt! Fly, swift as thought,

“ And bring them hither.” SIGBERT, joyful, heard,
And bounded on alone.

To those around

ALFRED thus spake: “ Light ye your brands! I lead
“ To give yon fleet to the devouring flames!”
Waving the torch, fast to the ships they sped,
And soon approach’d them. Wondering, ALFRED saw
No bank to guard, no forces to protect!
“ This,” he exclaim’d, “ is danish confidence! 220
“ Beholding none to check them, they believed
“ This isle subdued, and every Saxon’s sword
“ Wrench’d from his grasp. Delusion oft is found
“ Precursor of destruction. Forth proceed!”

ALFRED then foremost march’d to the first ship 225
That bore the danish women and exclaim’d,
“ Strangers to this our land, whence are ye? say!”
Straight from the bark, there leap’d a woman, tall,
Who to the King approach’d, and with an eye
Of fiery meaning cried:

“ First, murder me! 230

“ Saxon, behold my heart!” The King, amazed,
Awhile stood silent, then replied: “ Thy death,
“ Woman! I seek not.” Wilder beam’d her eye,
As thus she spake: “ Thou art the Saxon foe!
“ Mercy we ask not, but to death look on 235
“ Firm as thou seest me! All here await—
“ Slaughter! We are forsaken of our gods—
“ Our husbands, let us die! But, this I say,

" I am the wife of one mighty in war,
" Who for my death, over this land, will spread 240
" One sea of gore, whilst Danes, to madness stung,
" Shall hunt thee to the very gates of hell,
" Thee and thy race! Now let the hungry ravens
" Wade through our blood!—Death hath no terrors here!"

By her bold words, rous'd to superior wrath, 245
Each danish woman rose, and from the barks
Look'd eager, waiting undismay'd their ends;
Whilst Saxons, thronging round, astonish'd saw
The look of fury, and the eye that spake—
Permanent wrath.—When ALFRED thus replied: 250
" My words are peace! your lives are safe! abide,
" Here, where you are; no harm shall on you light;
" But if you rather seek your husbands, go!
" Protected here or there.—Our foes are men!—
" Our only object to destroy this fleet." 255

The woman said, " Thou art a gallant chief!
" Pity it were, methinks, to see thee fall,
" As soon thou must, before the sword, whose edge,
" Keen as the icy blast, thou knowest not!
" Here will we wait the issue of the fight. 260
" Now waste and spoil!" Then to her bark she sped.
Turning to those around, ALFRED exclaim'd,
" Burn! devastate!" Forth every Saxon rush'd

⁴ It was common for the wives of the Danes to attend their husbands to battle whose presence inspired the warrior with greater courage.

From ship to ship (save where the women dwelt)
Bearing the fiery brand—All was one blaze! 265

Whilst the destroying columns stream'd on high
Their forked splendors, ALFRED view'd the scene
Calm and unmoved—planning the future deed;
Whilst all the host of Saxons sported round
In frantic merriment, shouting aloud.— 270
So on some calm and wintry eve, appears
The boreal meteor, through whose dancing light
Arcturus shines, tranquil and dignified,
Urging his destin'd course.

As in the east,
The morning sun appear'd, scarce had the flames 275
Subsided, or the crimson glow of Heaven
Changed to its azure hue; when ALFRED cried:
“ Subjects, behold our fierce invader's fleet!
“ Had Danes opposed, then had your courage shone;
“ Now is the honor less, the use the same: 280
“ Thanks to our fortune and the hand of Heaven!—
“ The great, the important moment hastens fast
“ That shall determine whose our native isle.
“ Now will we march to Selwood, and embrace
“ Our waiting brethren; then are we prepared 285
“ To meet the danish chieftains and decide
“ ODDUNE's suspended fate.” Instant they cried,
“ To Selwood! Live our Prince!” when, SIGBERT stood,
Sudden, before the King!

Dark was his eye,

Scouling, and not a word he spake: The King 290
Cried, "SIGBERT! whither hast thou been? What news
"Of the two Danes?" Nor yet a word he spake,
But look'd to earth, downcast, when ALFRED thus:

"Thy sword is bloody! I conjure thee, say!
"Whence came it? Stand not thus insensible!" 295

When SIGBERT said:

"I cannot lie, oh King!

"But I do fear to tell thee;—I have slain

"The flying foe." "Slain him!" replied the King;

"Did I not warn thee with a Monarch's voice

"To spare him and conduct him to our sight? 300

"Whence came the deed?" SIGBERT replied, "One Dane,

"These eyes beheld not, but, retiring fast,

"I saw the other, and, o'ertaking, cried,

"Dane, as thou valu'st life, yield me thy sword!"

"He stopp'd and drew, we fought; I vanquish'd him."

"When vanquish'd," said the King, "had he not strength

"To reach our presence? Answer these my words!"

"It must be told!—then know, oh King! the Dane

"Pleaded for life," cried SIGBERT, "but mine ear

"Scorn'd his petition; him I thus address'd: 310

"Thou reptile! villain black! thou imp of hell!

"If angels from their silver clouds look'd down,

"And shouted, "Spare him!" with a voice of thunder,

"I would disdain them all, for ere thou breath'st

"A second time, thy venomous blood shall flow! 315

"So saying, with this sword I closed his eyes.—

"No ordeal will I shun!⁵—brave was the deed!"

5 It was by an appeal to some ordeal, among the Anglo-Saxons, by which the validity of any criminal charge was attested. There were five kinds of ordeals common at this time.

1. The ordeal of hot iron. 2. The ordeal of hot water. 3. The ordeal of cold water. 4. The ordeal of the corsned; and 5. The ordeal of the cross.

"1. THE ORDEAL OF HOT IRON. This was of two kinds, and performed either with a ball of iron, or with a certain number of plough-shares. The former was conducted in this manner: A ball of iron was prepared, of one, two, or three pound weight, according to the nature of the accusation. When all the prayers and other religious ceremonies were finished, this ball was put into a fire, and made red hot, after which it was taken out. The accused having signed himself with the cross, and sprinkled his hand with holy water, took the ball of hot iron in his hand, and carried it to the distance of nine feet; after which his hand was put into a bag, and sealed up for three days; at the expiration of which it was examined, in the presence of twelve persons of each party. If any marks of burning appeared on it, the accused was found guilty; if none, he was declared innocent. The other way of performing this ordeal was, by making the person who was to be tried, walk blindfolded, with his feet bare, over nine hot plough-shares, placed at certain distances. If he did this without being burnt, he was adjudged innocent; if not, guilty. 2. THE ORDEAL OF HOT WATER. When the private preparations were finished, the person to be tried was conducted with great solemnity to the church, where the priest began, by saying certain prayers suitable to the occasion; after which mass was to be celebrated; and before the accused was permitted to communicate, he was adjured in the most awful form of words, to confess if he was guilty. Fire was then kindled under a pot, filled with water, and whilst the water was heating, the priest said many prayers composed for that purpose. As soon as the water began to boil, a stone was suspended in it by a string, at the depth of one, two or three palms, according to the nature of the accusation. The pot was then taken down and placed by the side of the fire, and the prisoner having said the Lord's prayer, and marked himself with the sign of the cross, plunged his naked hand and arm into the water and snatched out the stone. His arm was instantly wrapped in linen clothes, and put into a bag, which was sealed by the judge in the presence of the spectators. The accused was then restored to the priest, who produced him in the same church at the end of three days; when the bag was opened, the bandages taken off, and the arm examined by twelve of his own friends, and twelve of the friends of the prosecutor. If any marks of scalding then appeared upon the arm, the prisoner was found guilty, if no such marks could be discovered he was acquitted. 3. THE ORDEAL BY COLD WATER. The person who was to be tried by this test, was put under the direction of a priest, who obliged him to fast for three days, when he was publicly brought into the church, and conjured to confess the truth; if he then persisted in his innocence, he was immediately conducted to the pool, where a priest prayed, that if he was guilty, the water might reject him, and cause him to float upon the water; but that if he was innocent, that it would receive him into its bosom. The accused was then stripped naked, his hands and legs made fast, and a rope tied about his middle, with a knot upon it, at the distance of a yard and a half from his body; he was then thrown into the pool, if he floated, he was taken out and declared guilty, if he sank so deep as to bring

“What do I hear? Didst thou disdain a foe
 “That ask'd for mercy?” ALFRED cried; “I did,”
 SIGBERT exclaim'd, “for, thinking of the wrongs, 320
 “Many and deep, this head had borne, I said,
 “When tygers spare their prey, then, prostrate Dane!
 “I will spare thee,” and instant through his heart
 “Plunged this my sword.”

With slow and solemn tone,
 ALFRED replied, “Thou art no friend of mine! 325

the knot on the rope under water, he was instantly pulled out and pronounced innocent. 4. THE ORDEAL OF THE CORSED. The Corsned, or the consecrated bread and cheese, was the ordeal to which the clergy commonly appealed when they were accused of any crime; in which they acted a very prudent part, as it was attended with neither danger nor inconvenience. This ordeal was performed in the following manner. A piece of barley bread and a piece of cheese, were laid upon the altar, over which a priest pronounced certain conjurations, and prayed with great fervency, that if the person accused was guilty, God would send his angel Gabriel to stop his throat, that he might not be able to swallow that bread and cheese. These prayers being ended, the culprit approached the altar, took up the bread and cheese, and began to eat it. If he swallowed freely he was declared innocent, but if it stuck in his throat, and he could not swallow it, he was pronounced guilty. 5. THE ORDEAL OF THE CROSS. The cross was an object of so much superstitious veneration during the times of the Anglo-Saxons, that it is no wonder it should be employed as an ordeal. In criminal trials, the trial of the cross was commonly thus conducted: When the prisoner had declared his innocence upon oath, and appealed to the judgment of the cross, two sticks were prepared exactly like one another; the figure of the cross was then cut on one of these sticks, and nothing on the other; each of them was then wrapped up in a quantity of fine white wool, and laid on the altar, or on the relics of the saints; after which a solemn prayer was put up to God, that he would be pleased to discover, by evident signs, whether the prisoner was innocent or guilty. These solemnities being finished, a priest approached the altar, and took up one of the sticks, which was uncovered with much anxiety. If it was the stick marked with the cross, the prisoner was pronounced innocent; if it was the other, he was declared guilty. When the judgment of the cross was appealed to in civil cases, the trial was conducted in this manner: The judges, parties, and all concerned being assembled in a church, each of the parties chose a priest, the youngest and stoutest that he could find, to be his representative in the trial. These representatives were then placed, one on each side of some famous crucifix; and at a signal given, they both at once stretched their arms at full length, so as to form a cross with their body. In this painful posture they continued to stand, while divine service was performing; and the party whose representative dropped his arm first, lost his cause.” The ordeal by judicial combat was not introduced, 'till nearly two centuries after this period.

" I now disclaim thee! Never from this hour

" Approach, but let the murderer's name and scorn,

" Light on thee, and reward this fiendish deed!"

Not with more sudden paleness look'd that man—

The ruler ANNANIAS, when he heard 330

The servant of the Lord denounce his judge

With aspect terrible, than SIGBERT look'd,

At these his Monarch's words. He smote his breast,

And turn'd away, stung with remorse and shame.

When ALFRED spake his troops, " Subjects, rejoice!

" This night hath saved the state ! Return we now

" To Selwood, on the morrow we may say

" Where duty next shall call us."

The wide shore

Rang with their loud acclaim—re-echoed far;

And all triumphant to the forest march'd. 340

END OF BOOK X.

ALFRED. BOOK XI.

ARGUMENT.

ODDUNE escapes from Kenwith Castle, and arrives at Selwood Forest.

NOW had the Saxons reach'd again the fort
'Mid Selwood's wilds. Whilst journeying on their way,
Absorbed in thought, the tread of multitudes
Was heard distinct. And often by the skirt
Of some deep wood, or in the valley, sounds 5
From the wild echo came, and, to their minds,
Convey'd a transient freedom from the cares
Which still they felt; like what the mariner
Shipwreck'd may feel, when, 'scaping in his boat
On the wide sea, he casts a ravish'd eye 10
At the warm glow of Heaven—the setting sun.

Ere the grey dawn of morning came, the King
Arose, and wander'd 'mid the prostrate host,
Whose shields, upon the ground, lay scatter'd, mark'd
With honorable scars. The sun now rose, 15

Glowing refulgent; whilst the dew-drops bright,
 Spread on the neighbouring trees or couchant thorn,
 Look'd like celestial spirits to the eye
 Of sportive fancy, that around encamp'd
 To guard the sleeping Saxon.

ALFRED spake, 20

When all upleap'd, and round him throng'd to learn
 Their future destiny. Thus he began:

“ Cheer up my friends, the God whom you have serv'd
 “ And in whose strength confided, hath appear'd
 “ For you and me. I would not buoy your hearts 25
 “ With hopes unfounded, for I now declare,
 “ Full and distinct, to every man around,
 “ Our prospect still is hid in mists and clouds
 “ Thick and portentous. Tho' success hath crown'd
 “ Our last endeavour, yet, we know too well 30
 “ The malice and exterminating rage
 “ Of these our enemies. Their fleet destroy'd,
 “ Will but inspire their minds, with deeper wrath
 “ And more determin'd vengeance; for our eyes
 “ Will soon behold them, not as heretofore, 35
 “ Vindictive only, but, with looks of hell,
 “ With wolfish appetites, fill'd with o'erboiling rage
 “ And black revenge.

“ When of success I spake,

“ It was the final issue, for the race
 “ Of future Saxons. We shall till the soil 40
 “ But they will reap! I must declare my thoughts!

" Mine is the full propulsion of the heart
" Not to be check'd. Cut off from aid, the Danes
" Before our growing might, at length, must fall;
" But, fatal is the process! I may die! 45
" Nay most of you who hear me too may die!
" But oh, for what? Reserve your latest breath,
" If in the fight you fall, to ask, for what
" Your blood then flows, and with that thought expire.

" Oh ye in after times, who know the worth 50
" Of peace and liberty, who underneath
" Your quiet tents, survey the scene around,
" Smiling upon your offspring, whilst no dread
" Of fierce barbarian haunts your midnight couch;
" And when ye wander 'mid the thicket's shade 55
" Fear not the solitary path, lest there
" Some vengeful Dane should crouch, oh think of us,
" Of what we bore to purchase for our sons
" The boon their fathers knew not!

" In us dwells,
" Why should we truth dissemble?—in us dwells, 60
" A secret but most fix'd and sovereign hope
" To live in after times! Where is the man,
" Whose heart e'er throbb'd with love of human kind,
" Who never yet desired, when he had long
" Slept in the silent grave, to share the praise 65
" Of virtue and of goodness, and to know
" Succeeding generations should look back
" And bless his name and feel their spirit fired,

" By his example, to pursue the end,
" For which they toil along life's rugged road, 70
" Nor fear the way? Next to the smiles of Heaven
" And our own conscience is the good man's praise!
" A spur to action, urging on the soul
" To lofty flights, and deeds magnanimous.—
" Deem it no crime, subjects! that hope is mine. 75

" As Heaven alone foresees who in this war
" May perish, if I die, you who survive,
" Forget not to declare I valued life,
" But for my people's good. My little reign
" Hath not disclosed my character; I feel 80
" Such yearnings to be call'd, the faithful friend—
" The father of my people; I have thought,
" With such full fervency upon the good
" Of you, oh Saxons! I have so enjoy'd
" The scenes ideal, when upon my throne, 85
" So nobly fought for and so hardly won,
" I might in peace consult your benefit
" And practice all I ponder'd, that in truth,
" The thought of sudden and untimely death
" Doth half a coward make me! Did I say— 90
" Coward? oh no! there is no trembling here!
" I only dread, a coward to myself
" To stand; a traitor to this heart of mine
" Which God hath taught to love—those whom I rule.
" But He who searcheth well our deepest thoughts 95
" And knows the frailty of our best resolves—

" Poor human nature! If his eye should see
 " Th' inconstant purpose here, I ask not life;
 " I only pray that God would raise some up
 " Of purer heart and sterner fortitude 100
 " To meet this evil day."

Each Saxon round

At these last words was sad. Tho' grieving, none
 Told of his grief—it was not such as words
 Might speak of, but within press'd heaviest.

ALFRED again: " It eases much my mind 105
 " Thus having said, we now must fearless march
 " To ODDUNE, that brave man, who, haply, now
 " His last meal contemplates! for famine long
 " Hath threaten'd him, but he shall soon behold
 " Our waving banner, and, if Heaven permit, 110
 " Find at our hand deliv'rance."

Each, aloud,

Shouted, " To Kenwith!" Scarce had the sound ceas'd,
 As in the air an answering shout was heard!
 Thoughtful the Saxons look'd, when, to their joy,
 ODDUNE the brave drew nigh!—the gallant man, 115
 For whom their swords were drawn, their hearts arousd.
 He flew to ALFRED! kneeling on the earth
 He clasp'd his hand! The King amazed beheld,
 Then cried,

" ODDUNE! and is it thee? My sight,
 " I cannot trust it! Let me hear thy voice!" 120
 Said ODDUNE looking up, " Oh best of Kings!

"It is thy faithful Servant. ALFRED cried,
"How cam'st thou here? declare!" ODDUNE replied,
"From the besiegers' sword, by night we fled
"Urged on by famine. Now are we prepared 125
"To follow thee, oh King! and prove again
"Our patience and good zeal."

"Is this thy tale?"

Said ALFRED, "I too deep an interest feel
"Not to require each circumstance, since last
"We parted mournfully." ODDUNE thus spake: 130

"When in the woody glen, and by the side
"Of that clear brook I left thee, forth I went,
"Alone, at thy last words disconsolate;
"And felt poor hopes that ever better days
"Would meet us.

"As I sought the western land,
"It was a moving sight, to see the earth
"Untill'd, the orchard overgrown with weeds,
"And ever by my lonely path, what once
"Had been a dwelling, desolate, the walls
"All black with smoke. How heavy beat my heart,
"When as I pass'd some cottage, roofless, burnt,
"I saw the little garden, still adorn'd
"With plants, and bedded round with box and mint,
"And the wild thyme, yet, half o'ergrown with weeds,
"That, springing up, declared no master near 145
"To check them, or relieve the scatter'd flowers
"That from beneath peep'd out. Full vain to tell

" The havoc of these Normans, all around
 " I mark'd their desolation, and beheld
 " Rapine and fire.

" Soon as I reach'd the west, 150
 " Tidings I sent for all of Saxon blood
 " To join my standard: and with pride I saw
 " The rich, the destitute, the young and old
 " Throng round me, and again I thought, success
 " Might yet attend our cause.

" Before the morn 155
 " We rose to practice arms. A braver band
 " I thought no Chief might need. Still we went on
 " Collecting, and each day beheld our ranks,
 " Grow with our confidence. But now the news
 " Reach'd us, that HUBBA from the Cambrian shore
 " Pass'd over, and a host of mighty men
 " With whetted appetites for fire and blood!
 " I then revolved what best might serve our cause,
 " And call'd for counsel. To resist were vain!
 " There was a certain castle, Kenwith, near: 165
 " To that we fled! when as we reach'd the gates,
 " Upon a hill, adjacent, we beheld
 " The danish Chief, HUBBA, and round, a host
 " Of fierce barbarians.

" The castle gates
 " We scarce had closed, when up the enemy 170

" Hubba, who commanded the danish troops in the absence of his brother Ivar, had invaded Wales, and destroyed all with fire and sword. After which he passed over to the coast of Devonshire with the same intention, and besieged Earl Oddune in Kenwith castle."

" Came shouting, and a fierce and haughty Dane
 " Bore me this summons. " Instant spread your gates,
 " Saxon! or, by immortal THOR! each man
 " Before the morning light, death shall o'erwhelm."
 " I heard, and bade him to his Chieftain bear 175
 " This answer, " Waster from the north, thy threats,
 " ODDUNE disdains! Tell him we have a King"—
 " I spake of thee.—Wond'ring the Dane retired.

" Now night was drawing near, when thus I cried:
 " Saxons, attend! Through all the castle, search,
 " And name what food, for we are now cut off
 " From present succour. Instant search was made,
 " And soon I learn'd, that there was left in store
 " Ten days provision only. Loud I cried,
 " That ten shall be made twenty! Now prepare 185
 " Your hearts for combat, till some trusty man
 " Shall flee to ALFRED and declare our state.

" One of tried confidence I call'd. He came
 " When thus I spake: Find thou the King! Untired
 " Urge on thy course! Seek him through distant town,
 " And forest luring; ask of hamlet small;
 " And let the passing traveller stand still
 " To answer, for, on thee, our lives all hang!"

The King replied, " I saw him not! What course
 " Took the said man." Thus ODDUNE spake: "Awhile
 " Stay thy concern, thou soon shalt know.

" The night

" Pass'd on in consultation, and we weigh'd
 " What best might serve. When, from the watch-tower top
 " We spied the sun uprising—bursting forth 200
 " In all his splendors; with that goodly sight
 " We saw the Danes, circling the castle walls.
 " I need not tell, to thee, what thoughts were ours
 " At that big moment, when before us, Danes
 " Raved for our blood.—All was full confidence! 205
 " These words I owe to the brave men, who now
 " Throng round their Monarch, and behold in him
 " Their father—children true themselves!"

A shout

From universal feeling and applause
 Rang through the air; and when again the Chief 210
 Prepared to speak, the sounds more lofty grew,
 Holding his words at bay.—Like some tall tree,
 Or elm, or poplar, when the tempest bends
 Its quivering head, and ever as it aims
 To cast its foliage back, and gaze at Heaven, 215
 More furious feels the blast. When ODDUNE thus:

" From the high battlements we could behold
 " The work of death preparing, and the hour
 " Approaching fast, when every Saxon man
 " Must prove his sword and heart. For ten long days
 " This sight we saw, and as the morning dawn'd,
 " Upon the next, they came! We saw them come
 " Prepared for storm and slaughter.
 " Soon beneath

" There stood a mighty host, who with such yells
 " Fill'd the surrounding air, that, for awhile, 225
 " We only heard, one sense predominant.
 " And now they rais'd the ladder, and began
 " To mount the walls! I need not tell, oh King!
 " How we received them. Never saw I yet
 " The Saxon sword so busy, or their shields 230
 " Staying so many darts. We stood like men!
 " Upon that morn, tho' not unmindful, I,
 " Fought with less ardour, to myself it seem'd,
 " Than each man now who round thee listens, still,
 " So dreadful was their valour!" Every eye, 235
 Admiring view'd the Chief, whilst the King cried,
 " The coward never talks of cowardice;
 " ODDUNE, I know thee well! Speak on!" He spake.

" Hard was the contest, but at length we saw
 " The danish sword rise heavily, whilst heaps 240
 " Writhing o'er heaps, beneath the ramparts lay;
 " And all that yet ascended came to know
 " What 'twas to die.

" The contest now was o'er,
 " We view'd the Danes back to their camp retire,
 " Discomfited, calling most vehement 245
 " On Gods, but not the living God! Our hearts
 " Felt as they ought to feel. Now all around
 " We view'd our havoc. Underneath the walls
 " Lay heap'd unnumber'd victims! never yet
 " Saw I the look of death so terrible! 250

" Whilst thus we mark'd the spoil, a Dane drew near
" To ask the dead and dying; to refuse,
" I had not learn'd of thee.

" From the first day,
" Silent, there stood upon the loftiest tower
" Of Kenwith, one to mark if ought appear'd 255
" Of succour; for we yet had secret hopes,
" Fond, but unwise, and not to be essay'd
" By reason, that thou yet would'st show thyself
" From unlook'd quarter. So the patient man,
" Gazed and unceasing gazed.

" Now anxious thoughts
" Came on us, for the messenger, whose way
" Dangers beset; and each man felt, yet fear'd
" To tell his feelings. When the night drew near,
" As planning in our hall, to our surprise,
" Before us stood a stranger, one by thee 265
" Sent to declare of succour. When we heard
" Thy welfare, and that soon the Saxon sword
" Would fly to aid us, rapture were a word
" Too weak to tell our joy. The messenger
" Declared what he had heard, when, 'neath the walls
" Trembling he crouch'd. We thank'd him and, again,
" Bade him seek thee."

" Now of our food was left
" One day's provision only! Whilst despair
" Almost o'ercame me, suddenly I felt
" A power, an animating spirit, rouse, 275
" Most unaccountably, my heart; I cried,

“ To all, what oft I heard thee say, “ The brave
“ Shine most in danger. When the thunders sound,
“ And little minds exclaim, One moment more
“ And death will visit us, the brave stand firm, 280
“ And tho’ alive to danger, dictate calm
“ What best may serve them.” Such, let us be found!
“ ALFRED this sword presented me, and said,
“ I need not name thy duty,” and by Heaven
“ He needed not, I knew it. Hear me, friends! 285
“ One day’s provision only now remains!
“ Two paths present themselves! Within these walls,
“ T’ encounter famine, or, made desperate,
“ Pass through yon gates at midnight, and, if doom’d
“ To meet our foes, fight manfully, inspired 290
“ By all we hope to gain, or fear to lose.
“ Each answer’d, “ Let us dare the sudden flight.”
“ This was our resolution!

“ When eve came,
“ From the high battlements we saw the sun
“ Go down resplendent, and, anon, no ray 295
“ Shone through the sky. Now, where the danish camp
“ Spread wide, we mark’d unusual fires, and thought
“ Of victims immolated to their gods—
“ Such was the light in Heaven. We told our host,
“ Twelve hundred men, and having left in view 300
“ The Saxon standard, through the gates we pass’d!

“ Twas darkness all! the hollow wind flew by,
“ And each could hear it rise and die away—

" So perfect was the silence.

" From the gate

" We sudden turn'd, to keep the fatal spot 305

" Most distant, where, with fires and shouts, the Danes

" Held their mad orgies. Onward then we march'd,

" Still as the night, unceasing. One long day,

" Rapid, we urged our course, and, on the next,

" We met a chilling sight! A sight which some 310

" Might little heed, yet, such as thou wilt hear

" With sorrow. On the ground we saw the man,

" Whom, on a former day, we sent to thee

" To tell our state, and claim thy succour, stretch'd

" Upon the earth; He lay a mangled corse! 315

" The Danes had slain him.

" Pardon me, oh King!

" If I recount his worth, for he was one—

" Too good to be pass'd by.

" I knew him well!

" Beside my castle stood his cot, the seat

" Of many comforts, and tho' poor and low, 320

" He loved it and was happy. When the storm,

" The accustom'd chase forbade,² I loved to stray

² " The Anglo Saxons were greatly attached to the sports of the field, in which sports persons of rank and fortune, spent the greatest part of their time, when they were not engaged in war. Alfred was taught to hunt before he was taught to read; and of his skill in these sports, Asser thus speaks: " Before he was twelve years of age, he was a most expert and active hunter, and excelled in all the branches of that most noble art, to which he applied with incessant labour and most amazing success. For, his felicity in hunting, as well as in all other gifts of God, was really incomparable, as I myself have often witnessed." The business of a hunter was a more serious thing at that period than it is at present, when wolves, bears and boars, were the common objects of the chase. See Note 17, Book III. and Note 3, Book V.

" To this low cottage, where I learn'd that man
 " Look'd not to wealth for peace and happiness.
 " The mother at her spinning-wheel was there,³ 325
 " And round, her elder children, who, like her,
 " Earn'd well their bread. And when the hour of eve
 " Came on, the father, from his distant toil,
 " Returning, met his rosy child, who stood,
 " At the accustomed stile, to see his sire 330
 " Draw nigh, that ever with his arms embraced,
 " And bore him to his lowly dwelling near;
 " Where, as he entered, the fond smile arose
 " Spontaneous on each brow. Then would he taste
 " The frugal meal, or, holding on each knee 335
 " A prattling infant, toy awhile, or tell,
 " Some tale, that made their little eyes look up
 " In childhood's wonderment.

" When thus my feet
 " Sped at thy bidding to the west, to rouse
 " Courage in all who loved the Saxon weal, 340
 " I sought him first. 'Twas as the night approach'd.
 " I saw him with his family, but not
 " Cheerful, as heretofore; a sullen gloom
 " He had, for many a man went by, and told
 " Of thy disasters, and the vengeful Danes 345
 " That on his country prey'd—spreading around,
 " Ruin and death.

³ " From the time of the Saxons down nearly to our own, spinning has been the common occupation of women, so much so, that the spindle became the symbol of the sex, and an estate devolving to the female line, was formerly said, by the law, to descend to the distaff.

“ He had not left his cot
“ Full many a day, for when he look'd, and saw
“ His helpless children, and a wife so dear,
“ He grasp'd his father's sword, and at the door 350
“ Stood, fearless, to resist what foe or foes
“ Might dare invade it. When he view'd me near,
“ I yet behold him! rushing out, he cried,
“ My master! is it thee? And art thou yet
“ Spared in this dying hour?' I should have spoken,
“ But, creeping round my knees his children came
“ To welcome me; whilst from his mother's breast
“ One toward me bent; I saw his infant smiles,
“ And half forgot my sorrows. But enough!
“ I thus address'd the sire—KENRED his name: 360

“ To rouse the country hither am I come,
“ Sent by our Monarch; we must one and all
“ Make the last effort. Looking firm, he said,
“ Here are my wife and children! need I say
“ How dear they are? thou knowest it! yet these, 365
“ I can forsake to aid my blessed King
“ And serve my country! Me the solemn voice
“ Of duty calls, I hear it and obey.”

“ Till death, I never shall forget the scene
“ When from his door we went. The mother came,
“ Who silent stood before, and, weeping, cried,
“ Husband may God preserve thee!” Saying this
“ She back retired. The children now drew near,

" And one, the elder girl, to me thus spake,
 " From harm preserve my father—he is dear!"
 " She thought my power too great! Devoted maid!
 " If living, thou wilt mourn thine error! Then
 " We left the cottage.

" Never braver man
 " Join'd in thy service. Through the country round,
 " He journey'd, calling forth all arms to aid:
 " And soon a valiant host, to serve their King,
 " Came crouding near. I told thee how we fled 380
 " To Kenwith, and on that important hour,
 " When needing some stout heart, I thought of him,
 " And sent him as a man, wary, yet bold,
 " To find thee, and declare our state. And here,
 " Lay his sad corse! I could have died myself, 385
 " Nor suffer'd half what I endured for him.—
 " We gave him sepulture!

" Now where to turn
 " We knew not, till, in looking round, we saw
 " A lonely damsel, journeying with her load 390
 " Of fruits and cates: of whom we ask'd for thee.
 " Timid she answered, " To the King's resort
 " I now am hast'ning with this load; the way
 " Glad, will I shew! Conducted by the maid,
 " We reach'd this castle, and with unfeign'd joy 395
 " Again behold our King."

ALFRED exclaim'd,
 " Subjects, thrice welcome after toils like yours,
 " And perils deep!" When turning to the Chief

He said, " Good ODDUNE, this most piteous tale
 " Afflicts me, and so hangs upon my mind, 400
 " That I could half have wish'd, I had not heard—
 " What do I say? Should ever King regret
 " The tale of misery?—a moment shun
 " To learn his subjects' wrongs, and, not to hear,
 " Fancy they are not felt? This luxury, 405
 " I know it not! My ear shall hear them all!
 " This heart commiserate, and, if I live,
 " This hand relieve! Such are the duties great
 " I recognise, and such the King will feel
 " Who knows his office.
 " I will well retain 410
 " All thou hast said, and, if the hour of peace
 " Should come, convince that wretched family—
 " Nay all the wretched, that in Britain's King
 " There dwells a heart which never yet disdain'd
 " The tale of sorrow. Now prepare for deeds 415
 " Of warfare, for the Danes to madness rous'd
 " Will soon approach us."

Each his Monarch heard,
 And forth retired, save ODDUNE, whom the King
 Detain'd, ALSWITHA's sufferings to rehearse.

ALFRED. BOOK XII.

SCENE—THE DANISH CAMP BEFORE KENWITH CASTLE.

ARGUMENT.

THE Danes attack Kenwith Castle; find the Saxons fled; Ivar arrives; Death of Ella; intelligence brought of the destruction of the Fleet; Quarrel of Hubba and Guthrum.

“NOW is the hour arrived!” HUBBA exclaim’d—
Gazing on Kenwith’s towers, “Soon shall yon flag,
“That now exalts its head, waving in scorn,
“With every man in that devoted pile
“On earth lie prostrate.” Turning to his troops 5
He cried, “When on the battlements you see
“This sword triumphant, spreading all around,
“Death and destruction, imitate your Prince!
“Nor till you see him stay the work of death,
“Warriors, stay ye! for, by the immortal gods! 10
“I swear no Saxon shall survive this day.”
When GUTHRUM rais’d his voice, but as he spake
HUBBA replied, “Proceed! no moment this
“For words, march on!” The danish army march’d.

As near the walls they came, each, confident, 15
Look'd for the hostile sword, yet, none appear'd!
And as beneath the beetling walls they stood
And saw no Saxon, dim conjectures rose;
When GUTHRUM thus: "Beware the ambushade!"
"This wily foe prepares new plans to stay 20
"The hour of vengeance." HUBBA cried, "In vain!
"These swords shall meet him!"

Soon they gain'd the height!
Yet, not a Saxon saw they. "View your chief!"
Said HUBBA, as he downward leap'd, enraged,
Grasping his battle-axe. Nor yet a foe! 25
O'er all the place he look'd, and wond'ring saw
The gates unbarred, and soon, in triumph, rush,
Danes unresisted. Then each warrior found
ODDUNE had fled! In mute surprise they stood,
Stifling their wrath, when HUBBA, near, espied 30
An aged Hound, blind, and for master lost
Howling disconsolate. The Chieftain rais'd
A savage shout, and as he saw the beast
Cried, "Yet one foe," and with his ponderous axe,
Shatter'd his brain. When wrathful he exclaim'd: 35

"Gods, and the Saxons gone! these spacious walls
"Untenanted! The gates wide open! thus,
"Laughing at all our toil, and nothing here
"To wreak our vengeance on! The sacrifice,
"On yester eve, hath play'd us as ye see 40
"Strange work. But, whither are they gone? what rout?

" GUTHRUM, the horsemen! mark their steps! proclaim
 " Instant pursuit, and when your swords o'ertake,
 " Kill all! Tho' ODIN stood before,¹ this sword
 " Would pierce him through, to meet that man, the last
 " Of flying Saxons."

GUTHRUM forth prepared;
 When, in the distance, like the morning mist,
 A sight appear'd, and yet the sun was up,
 The sky unclouded. Each with earnestness,
 Look'd to the spot, when HUBBA cried, " Beware! 50
 " A coming army! by my horse's mane,²
 " ALFRED himself!—Nay, fellows, shout aloud!
 " IVAR my brother comes! Behold him there!
 " I see the well-known standard! Danes, rejoice!
 " Now are our hopes fulfilled, and now our swords 55
 " Sea, Earth and Heaven may dare! He comes!"
 When straight before his face IVAR appear'd!
 Who thus began:

" HUBBA! behold around,
 A gallant host, panting to meet the foe,
 " And scourge the murd'ers of our sire! That day 60
 " Now fast approaches! On the southern shore

¹ The Danes very commonly, in the excess of their courage, defied the gods themselves. "Saxo Grammaticus speaks of a Dane, who ardently wished to meet with Odin that he might attack him. Where is he (he cried) whom they call Odin, that warrior so completely armed, who hath but one eye to guide him? Ah, if I could but see him, this redoubted spouse of Freya; in vain should he be covered in his snow-white buckler, in vain mounted on his lofty steed, he should not leave his abode of Lothra without a wound. It is lawful to encounter a warrior god."

² An usual oath with the Danes.

“ We deem’d it well to bid our women stay,
 “ They and their children, till we met with thee,
 “ Soon shall they join us here. What news since last
 “ Britain beheld me?”

HUBBA thus replied: 65

“ On every side the dastard Saxons flee!
 “ This Isle is ours! nor now one foe remains
 “ To brave our onset. Now, the fight is o’er!
 “ Thou comest here to revel on rich spoils,
 “ Not to contend with enemies, whose force 70
 “ Deserves thy valour. I have done the deed!
 “ The merit mine!”

IVAR transported cried,

“ Thanks to the gods we worship! Thanks to him,
 “ First of the heavenly throng, who from his halls
 “ Descends when dangers threaten, and amid 75
 “ Our army stands. But let us know thy deeds!
 “ What hast thou done? And where the Saxon King—
 “ ALFRED, that stubborn foe?” When HUBBA thus:

“ Our native mountains or Finmarkian plains,
 * Never such valour witness’d, as this land. 80
 “ The feats of former wars, a semblance faint
 “ Of these my deeds and GUTHRUM’S! We have gone
 “ Far through the land of Cambria, scattering death,
 “ And made our hearts so conversant with blood
 “ And fatal resolutions, that till now, 85
 “ I never rightly priz’d perils and strife.
 “ Now is this land our own! the toil is o’er!

" And when the spoil is gather'd, we are free
 " To form new plans, and subjugate new climes.
 " Now is our father's death aveng'd! This Isle, 90
 " Curs'd with his blood, shall long the day bewail
 " That saw him perish. Dost thou, IVAR! ask,
 " Where ALFRED is? would I could say in death!
 " Where is the fox when the sun shines on high?

" Did I not name our father's death avenged? 95
 " IVAR, not yet! I have a captive here,
 " Whom to behold, will make thy very heart
 " Labour with ecstasy. ELLA is mine!—
 " The base Northumbrian King! That man is here,
 " Who slew our father!"

" Dost thou mock me? say!"
 IVAR exclaim'd. " ELLA! the Saxon King!
 " How came he thine? Lend me thy thunders, THOR!
 " Thy lightnings lend me! and inspire my heart
 " To find some curse tenfold more horrible
 " Than man hath yet endured! Now HUBBA, say, 105
 " Whence came the captive?" HUBBA thus replied:

" Hear the glad tale! When to thy native shore
 " I saw thee sail, to rouse our countrymen
 " Against this Isle; northward I sped to seek
 " The man whom Danes most hate. Soon I beheld,
 " OGBERT; the fight began!³ Before our swords

³ Ogbert, or Osbert one of the two kings of Northumberland, whom Hubba defeated before he attacked Ella.

" He fell and all his host. Next ELLA came,
 " Proud on his prancing steed, of victory sure,
 " And counting o'er his slaughter'd enemies:
 " Such was his confidence. I turn'd and cried, 115
 " Behold the murderer of your King! This day
 " We will perform a deed, of which the Scald,
 " Hereafter shall delight to sing, and tell,
 " How HUBBA in his greatness met the man
 " Who slew his father; what he there perform'd, 120
 " Whilst vengeance flapt her wing, what spoil was won,
 " What banquets to the hungry wolves were given,
 " When, calling on our gods, ODIN and THOR,
 " This fight began."

" Long and severe the strife!
 " Till, by our arms o'erpower'd, the Saxons fled! 125
 " Death follow'd them! Our very swords were hot
 " With that day's slaughter! ELLA was my prey!
 " With this strong arm I beat him to the ground!
 " I rais'd him up! This sword defended him—
 " To crown the day of vengeance when we met. 130
 " Now thou art here, now shall our wrath be shewn.
 " Bring forth the captive ELLA!"

IVAR cried,

" Thou worthy son of an exalted sire,
 " Thou art my brother! Now a flood of wrath
 " We both will pour o'er ELLA, he shall feel 135
 " The bitterness of death, yet cease to die
 " Till we revenge have had—full and complete.
 " He shall be flay'd!"

Now with his clanking chains,
Downcast, and pale, ELLA appear'd. The Danes
Scoffing beheld him. When the Chieftain cried 140
To those around, "Seize the perfidious King!"
"Tear off his garb!"

ELLA approach'd and said,
"Hast thou no mercy?" "Mercy!" cried the Chief,
"Where was thy mercy, when immured in earth,
"My father lay? how was thy pity shewn, 145
"When from thy dungeon,⁴ REGNER sent his voice,
"With kindled wrath, calling on us his sons
"To think of ELLA, whilst upon his heart

⁴ Regner Lodbrog, king of Denmark, the father of Ivar and Hubba, was killed by Ella, king of Northumberland, as stated in Note 2, Book I. Regner before his death composed a song, of which the following are the five last stanzas.

I. We fought with swords: this fills me with joy, because I know a banquet is preparing by the father of the gods. Soon in the splendid halls of Odin we shall drink beer out of the skulls of our enemies. A brave man shrinks not at death. I shall utter no repining words as I approach the palace of the gods.

II. We fought with swords. O that the sons of Aslauga † knew, O that my children knew the sufferings of their father! that numerous serpents, filled with poison, tear me to pieces! soon would they be here: soon would they wage bitter war with their swords. I gave a mother to my children, from whom they inherit a valiant heart.

III. We fought with swords. Now I touch on my last moments. I receive a deadly hurt from the viper. A serpent inhabits the hall of my heart. Soon shall my sons black their swords in the blood of ELLA! They wax red with fury: they burn with rage. Those gallant youths shall not rest till they have avenged their father.

IV. We fought with swords. Battles fifty and one have been fought under my banners. From my early youth I learned to dye my sword in crimson: I never yet could find a king more valiant than myself. The gods now invite me to them: Death is not to be lamented.

V. It is with joy I cease. The goddesses of destiny are come to fetch me. Odin hath sent them from the habitation of the gods. I shall joyfully be received into the highest seat. I shall quaff full goblets among the gods. The hours of my life are passed away. I die laughing.

† His second wife, whom he married after the death of Thora.

“ Fierce serpents prey’d? He died, and so shalt thou!
“ Seize him, and bind him to yon tree! there carve,
“ Upon his naked back, the eagle’s form,
“ Whilst we will gaze exulting.”

To the tree

The wretched ELLA now is bound! With joy,
And wielding their huge knives, two men approach,
And from the neck, downward, the long gash draw,
Then ’neath the shoulder, either side, extend
The goary weapon, and, with straining hand,
Rend the tough skin, till, o’er each elbow wide
The flaps are spread! when, to the gazing eye,
The red nerve quivers!

Silent, this agony, 160

ELLA had long endured, when IVAR cried,
“ Now let him die! HUBBA, thy lance prepare!
“ Transfix his heart!” HUBBA his lance uprais’d,
And stepping forward, pois’d the weapon well,
Then, hurl’d it furious! Through the sufferer’s heart,
It forced its way, and each of all around
Rais’d the loud shout as ELLA groan’d and died.⁵

When HUBBA thus: “ One task alone remains;
“ ALFRED our greater foe to seize and serve
“ Like yonder ELLA, whilst on high the ravens, 170
“ Snuffing their prey, sail slow, and croak for blood.”

⁵ This imagery is too violent for poetry, and would not have been introduced, if Saxo Grammaticus had not informed us, that this was the precise death which Ella suffered, from the ferocious and inhuman sons of Regner Lodbrog. Carving the eagle, as it was called, was a common punishment among the Danes.

While gazing round the scene, HUBBA exclaim'd,
 "What noise is that? the man! whence came he? say,
 "Stranger, thy business!" When the man approach'd,
 A mariner, and cried. "The day is lost! 175
 "Ruin approaches fast! The fleet! the fleet!"

"What meanest thou?" cried IVAR. "Mortal, speak!
 "Or death reward thee!" "Stay thy hand," the man
 Said trembling, "this my tale: The fleet is lost!
 "Burnt, vanish'd! Not a plank where once it lay 180
 "Now may be seen!"

Not more amazed the man
 Who meets his death-wound from some hidden cause,
 Than IVAR and the Chiefs that round him throng'd.
 "Burnt! did'st thou say?" th' indignant warrior cried,
 "Whence came the fire? The gods are on our part!
 "And where the Saxons? Say it not again!
 "Nay, own thyself a liar, or this sword
 "Wars with thy life!"

The mariner replied,
 "'Twas false! Now stay thy hand." IVAR exclaim'd,
 "Tell me the truth! Play with the lion's paw, 190
 "But, fear thy Prince!"

"If then declare I may,"
 Answer'd the mariner, "by this good sword,
 "My words were true! The fleet indeed is burnt!
 "The very clouds of Heaven caught the fierce glow!
 "Methinks I see it yet."

A sudden fear, 195

A dark anticipation, indistinct,
 Now fill'd the Danes. Their very natures changed
 To momentary languor, and so still'd
 Their fiery wrath, that each appear'd to each,
 Spell-bound and half forgetful of himself.— 200
 So the fierce wolves, that unmolested range
 The snowy arctic (whilst amid the plains,
 Or mountains bare, they give their hideous yells,
 Breaking the sleep of Nature, that half seems
 To rise from her eternal slumber, white, 205
 With fearful expectations and strange dreams)
 Till wand'ring through the ice or matted forest,
 Sudden, they meet the pitfall, and, for once,
 Forget their brumal appetites, and crouch
 Peaceful beside some brother of the wood. 210

Cried IWAR, whilst his labouring breath heaved hard,
 “Where are the women? Say, are they too burnt?”
 “All! All!” replied the man.
 “Vengeance afresh!”
 Exclaim'd the Chieftain. “Sharp your swords! prepare
 “For fiery wrath, and hate unquenchable!” 215
 Through all the danish ranks one sound was heard—
 “Blood! Blood!” whilst HUBBA turn'd—foaming with ire,
 And hurl'd at ELLA's corse another lance.

Rous'd from the transient silence, HUBBA cried,

⁶ It is not uncommon in the same pitfall, in the north, to find animals of different kinds (from the power of fear) all peaceably lying by each other; although between them in a state of freedom, the greatest hostility existed.

" Rejoice oh brother! this is as the brave 226

" Might truly wish! What led our footsteps here?

" Not to defend a fleet, but conquer crowns!

" And we will conquer! will, did I pronounce?

" Conquer'd we have! our vanquish'd enemies,

" Flee ever, whilst their boasted King, grown wise,

" Unfriended hides himself 'mid caves and rocks."

IVAR replied, " I do not like this news;

" And what thou say'st of crowns and victories

" Comes coldly to mine ear. Yet, we are Danes;

" And obstacles may meet but cannot fear." 230

" I tell thee," HUBBA cried, " This isle is ours,—

" Conquer'd, no foe remains, and ALFRED's self

" Quick vengeance shall o'ertake! I auger well

" This deed is his."

Now to the tower they pass,

When HUBBA thus: " GUTHRUM! what thoughts are thine?"

The Chieftain answer'd.

" Light as are the winds,

" I heed these tidings, yet, in human ways

" Strange accidents turn out, and wide the bounds

" Of possibility. This wasted fleet

" Might some time hence have serv'd our cause! Oh no!

" I wrong'd my better sense:—all aid is vain

" But that which centers in ourselves,—in Danes.

" The blow falls heaviest which despair brings down!

" Rash! false adviser! didst thou say despair?

"What word is that? We know it not," exclaim'd
 HUBBA, enraged. "Shall we whose mailed hearts
 "Fear never enter'd, for a moment name—
 "The thing despair?"

GUTHRUM indignant cried,
 "How speak'st thou, Chief! I, HUBBA! of despair,
 "Talk, and indulge weak fears for thee and me! 250
 "Young Prince, thou know'st me not! did I thus feel,
 "When, with thy father REGNER, I pursued
 "The fierce Biarmian? Never did I fear
 "Serpent or giant, or the evil hour
 "When coward's quake! I fear not even thee!" 255

"Thy sword!" cried HUBBA, "Now be death thy fate,
 "Or mine!" Him GUTHRUM answer'd not, but forth,
 Dared to the fight, and as they forward rush'd,
 IVAR exclaim'd, "Spirits of Hell, avaunt!
 "What means this strife? Oh Danes, restrain your wrath!
 "I grieve for this your rashness! where is now,
 "HUBBA! thy wisdom? GUTHRUM! thy controul?"
 Each warrior, still, remain'd; their massy shields,
 Rais'd, and their swords suspended in the air.
 When IVAR thus spake on.

GUTHRUM, forbear! 265
 "Check thy mad ire! Raise not, vindictive, thus,
 "Thy sword to slaughter, when before thee stands
 "Denmark's high Prince! And HUBBA, stay thy sword!
 "Think who before thee stands! Thy father's friend!
 "The guardian of our fortunes, and the man 270

" Whom REGNER, at his death, thought of and cried
 " He shall avenge my fall!" and true he spake,
 " He has avenged it! View him as he is,
 " Rash, yet endued with truth, and Heaven's best gifts,
 " Fidelity and courage."

GUTHRUM'S SWORD, 275

Dropp'd, and he cried, " The conflict now is o'er!
 " HUBBA, thy hand! We know ourselves too well,
 " Courage to doubt, for thou art brave, and I,
 " I trust, not less so. Let us save our wrath—
 " Saxons demand it!"

HUBBA sheath'd his sword 280

And with a vacant smile, that seem'd to hide
 Some lurking purpose, answer'd, " Be it so!
 " They do indeed demand it, but, to find,
 " There is the stratagem! They flee our shades,
 " And by their secret and night-brooding plans 285
 " Make all our threat'nings vain." HUBBA again,
 After a moment's pause.

" This recent loss

" We need not heed, but, that it seems to shew,
 " Our foes, tho' weak, unconquer'd, and resolved
 " To work in darkness. Danes can never fear! 290
 " But, to my mind, tho' of success secure,
 " One deed seems needful! we must deprecate
 " Heaven's anger, and a victim's blood must flow! 7

7 "The Danes sacrificed to their gods, horses, dogs and falcons, and on some occasions cocks and a fat bull. On times however of famine, or other national calamity, or at the eve of some dangerous war, they offered human sacrifices to their gods, believing them to be more accepta-

" For tho' this ill be small, and we may stand
 " Firm in our native strength, yet 'tis a thing; 295
 " Not lightly to be thought of, thus to lose
 " The noblest navy Denmark ever sent
 " To gain new conquests. Speak I not the truth,
 " Ivar, our brother?"

Ivar said, " Thou dost !

" Some blood must flow ! and that of human kind; 300
 " Gods will receive none else, but whose, this hour
 " Need not determine. I would further speak
 " Ere we begin the fight, and through the land
 " Seek ALFRED, that devoted man, whose death,
 " Fate has recorded; nine succeeding days⁸ 305
 " Will we our vows and prayers, make to the Gods
 " For our success. Then for the hour of wrath !"

ble than any other. The victims were chosen from the prisoners in time of war, and from the slaves in time of peace. The choice was partly regulated by the by-standers, and partly by lot. The wretches upon whom the lot fell, were treated with such honors by the assembly,—they were so overwhelmed with caresses, for the present, and with promises, for the life to come, that they sometimes congratulated themselves on their destiny. But the Danes as well as other northern nations did not always sacrifice such mean persons; in great calamities, in a pressing famine for example, if the people thought they had some pretext to impute the cause of it to their king, they even sacrificed him without hesitation, as the highest price with which they could purchase the divine favour. In this manner the first king of Vermland was burnt in honor of Odin, to put an end to a great dearth. Hacon, king of Norway, offered his son in sacrifice to obtain of Odin the victory over his enemy Harold. And Aune, king of Sweden, devoted to Odin the blood of his nine sons, to prevail on that god to prolong his life."

8 The Danes were particularly fond of the number nine. Thus Heimdal was the son of *nine* virgins. The ring which Hermod bore through the flames of Hela, had the wonderful power given it by Odin of producing every *ninth* night, eight similar rings. The government of Hela consisted of *nine* worlds. Thor, in his contest with the great serpent of Midgard, recoils back *nine* steps. There are *nine* great rivers in hell; and Hermode in his journey to hell, in search of Balder, travelled for *nine* days and *nine* nights, through deep and dark valleys, before he arrived at the abode of Hela. Every *ninth* month the Danes renewed their sacrificing, which lasted *nine* days, at which time *nine* living victims were offered. A writer of the eleventh century, says, " At Leberun, the capital of Denmark, every *ninth* year, in the month

When, turning, thus:

“ GUTHRUM! ’tis meet to send
 “ Some trusty spy, to learn how now we stand,
 “ And where our enemies, what force they have; 310
 “ That when the hours of merriment are o’er
 “ Each Dane may rise to vengeance.” GUTHRUM heard,
 And forth withdrew.

The sounds his footsteps made
 Might yet be heard, when HUBBA thus began:
 “ Death on that Dane! approaching torments seize
 “ Sudden his carcass! May the birds of Hell⁹ 315

of January, the Danes flock together in crouds, and offer to their gods, *ninety-nine* men, as many horses, dogs, and cocks, with the certain hope of appeasing the gods by these victims.”

. 9 The sixty-seventh and sixty-eighth stanzas of the twelfth ode of the Edda, may be thus translated. Describing the punishments of hell.

I saw the man by lies defiled,
 With quivering lips and visage wild;
 The BIRDS OF HELL around him dart,
 And find, within his hollow heart,
 A black and spacious solitude
 To nurse secure their rav’nous brood;
 And when for blood the young-one cries,
 The parents pluck the liar’s eyes.
 The woes and pains that flourish there,
 No heart can judge, no tongue declare:
 Doleful beings crowd around,
 While through the vault a fearful sound,
 From Distraction, far and near,
 Forever strikes the startled ear.
 They who Hela’s realms behold,
 At times are hot, at times are cold,
 As before their glowing eyes,
 Damned spirits sink and rise.
 On this remote and dreary shore,
 With fiends and dragons cover’d o’er;
 Earth’s sad children rest their head,
 ’Mid ghastly fears and freezing dread.

"Gorge on his heart! He rais'd his sword 'gainst mine!

"Yes, IVAR! thou didst see the sight, thine eye

"Witness'd thy brother's shame! And HUBBA lives,

"Injured, yet unrevenge'd! Why did my arm—

"Spare him? Beneath my feet, why lay he not 320

"Mantled in gore? Nor yet too late the deed!

"IVAR! thou seest my sword; but, if again

"This hand should show it thee, and not o'erspread

"With GUTHRUM's blood, then may I never meet

"My murder'd father!"

Having said, he rush'd 325

Full to the door, but IVAR, following swift,

Seized him, and cried, "Withhold the fatal deed!

"Stay thy rash hand! Surrounded as thou art

"By death and dangers, would'st thou raise thy sword

"'Gainst GUTHRUM?—That old Chief, whose name

"Denmark shall long remember?"

"When I cease,"

Cried HUBBA, "to forget this hour, so deep

"Engraved with wrongs and shame unspeakable,

"May I forget myself! Thou saw'st his sword! 335

"And yet he lives! Denmark's triumphant Prince

"Stood and beheld a mortal raise his arm,

"Yet slew him not! But, brief the wrong. Away!

"Tempt not my wrath! Withhold thy iron grasp

"And give me passage, or, before this sword, 340

"E'en thou shalt fall! He dared my wrath! Stand by!

"Parley anon!"

"E'en now"—cried IVAR, "Stop!

"Thou shalt not pass! but, hear me! Stay thine ire,

" And listen, for before thee stands a pit,
 " Thou little know'st how deep! Are we not all 345
 " Surrounded by the Saxons? Would'st thou now—
 " At such an hour, look to thyself alone,
 " And not remember, that on hostile soil
 " We sojourn, whilst an enemy around
 " Longs for our discord—waiting to devour 350
 " Both thee and me? Be wise, and know thyself!
 " And if thou must, with blood, wipe out this stain,
 " Fancied not real,—stay till you arrive
 " In Denmark, and like fighting men of old
 " There end your broils."

HUBBA replied, "Tis well!

" Thy words are just! I now with thee will join,
 " First to subdue the Saxons,—lay them low,
 " Both Prince and Subject, then disclose the thoughts,
 " The purpose that lies here. The grand account
 " Shall be in after times. When GUTHRUM thinks
 " All in oblivion, then will I stand forth
 " For war! Yet may I now display, in part,
 " Something of that deep vengeance and full hate
 " That swells my heart.—He hath a Saxon slave—
 " A female Captive, fair as GIMER's child!—¹⁰ 365
 " Talk'd we not, IVAR! of some sacrifice
 " To appease the Gods?—But duty calls us hence!
 " Hereafter we will speak more confident."

¹⁰ See the journey of Skerner, in the *Edda of Sæmund*, translated by my excellent brother AMOS SIMON COTTLE, (8vo. 6s. Longman and Rees;) which work contains nearly all we know of the scandinavian mythology.

ALFRED. BOOK XIII.

SCENE—SELWOOD FOREST.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED determines to enter the Danish Camp as a Harper. Visit to the Woodman.

UPON his couch ALFRED had stretch'd himself,
Sleepless, tho' seeking sleep; on coming scenes
Poring with earnest brow. Before the dawn
His castle he forsook, and roam'd alone
Through the deep wood, unseeing and unseen 5
Save that amid the forest's thickest shades
He cast his eye, and, wondering, SIGBERT saw;
That lonely and most melancholy man!
Stalking sedate, on whom the dews of Heaven
Stood thick, and told his nightly wanderings far. 10

Still through the wood, the King in silence moved
Contemplating himself, tho' near his home
A stranger to its comforts; then again

Pondering on all the wrongs, deep and untold,
 His subjects felt, for whom at opening morn, 15
 And through the day, and at the hour of night,
 He loved to cherish plans—so great, that minds,
 Low-born and groveling might with one consent,
 Wrathful, have call'd, impossibilities !
 And, with convenient words and obstacles, 20
 Talk'd confident. Yet ALFRED prized such thoughts,
 And from his earliest youth, had sought to enlarge
 The bounds of human intellect, and prove,
 What joys the world might know if those who ruled
 Perform'd their duty.

Now uncertainty— 25
 Mists and thick clouds upon the future hung !
 He fear'd the crimson dawn would never burst
 That brought the hour, when he might consummate
 All that his heart had cherish'd. 'Mid the strife,
 To augment the tumult of his breast, again, 30
 (Like lightning, shooting through the midnight sky,
 That what before was dark, makes darker still;)
 ALSWITHA's form, through his distracted mind
 Rush'd dress'd in terrors. "Where is she," he cried,
 "And what her wrongs, unfriended, far away!" 35

When, near his path, he saw a woodbine, fair,
 Exhaling fragrancy, that, intertwined,
 Circled a deadly night-shade, then look'd down
 Upon the poisonous plant on which it lean'd,
 Pure and superior. He stopp'd! he gazed! 40

Silent awhile, then cried, "Thou beauteous flower !

"Thou art ALSWITHA, or an emblem true

"Of her I love; for as thou gently lean'st

"Upon yon venom'd plant, and yet remain'st

"Spotless and dignified, ALSWITHA thus 45

"Upon the Danes shall rest—a little space,

"Conscious of her high worth, and looking down

"Untainted on her foes. This is indeed

"Heaven's work to calm my mind."

A mighty plan

Now struck the King, attended with dismays 50

And dangers infinite, yet such as gave

To him no terrors. Hastening to the fort,

With earnest brow, thus, to his Chiefs he spake.

"Friends who with me have borne all ills, endured

"Perils and strife, there is a gallant act, 55

"A bold achievement, which, to crown our toil,

"Some round me must perform. I claim your patience !

"HUBBA and IVAR, with that other man—

"GUTHRUM, my most peculiar foe! are now

"Doubtless near Kenwith, forming future plans 60

"To desolate our country: well we know

"When stratagems and schemes are used, the like

"Should counteract them, and the antidote

"Be as the bane. I would advise this deed:—

"Instant some Saxon to go forth and learn, 65

"Amid the thickest Danes, e'en in their camp,

"How stands the enemy, their force how great,

“ Their next designs; whether the recent flight
 “ Hath staid their anger, or their savage wrath
 “ Made hotter.”

Each replied, “ Most wise; the thought
 “ Well was conceived!”

ALFRED thus answer made;
 “ If one must go, to meet the Danes, and learn
 “ By many wiles their state, clad in some guise,
 “ That bars suspicion; learning when they mean
 “ Next to assault us; where their weakness lies; 75
 “ With other knowledge, needful to be known,
 “ Yet only learnt among them.—Who around
 “ So proper as your King? The attempt be mine!
 “ I will depart alone.”

Ere he had ceased
 Each Chieftain's countenance had half express'd 80
 Joy's cheerful smile, for each had hoped himself
 That favour'd man; but when they heard the words,
 “ So proper as your King”—they look'd abash'd,
 Confounded, as the man who travels long
 O'er some parch'd desert, heartless, destitute 85
 Of food and shelter, when, 'mid harrowing fears,
 Far on his way he spies the distant vale
 Water'd and fill'd with plenty, but when fast
 He speeds to meet it, finds to his sore cost
 The fordless river, wide and stretch'd between. 90

Each Chief to ODDUNE look'd, waiting his words,
 Who thus the King address'd:

“ Thy pardon, Prince!

“ I ask, and if my words to thee seem harsh,

“ Again I claim forgiveness, but, my heart, 95

“ Thou must not question. Monarch, stay the deed!

“ Tear from thine eye the philm that covers it,

“ And view the precipice, that to thee seems

“ Smooth and secure. At this most trying hour

“ It is a subject's honor, to declare, 100

“ With firm, yet duteous words—one rash resolve,

“ One error, one false step, may sink us now

“ In ruin irretrievable, and bring

“ Destruction on us all.”

ALFRED exclaim'd,

“ Good ODDUNE! wherefore these ungrounded fears?”

The Chief replied, “ It is no common cause

“ And when I think what thou hast done to save

“ Thy ravaged country, what thine head hath borne,

“ Thy heart endured, thy gallantry perform'd

“ To screen from Denmark's race this hapless land

“ And cheer thy fainting subjects; when I cast

“ A backward glance, and think of days, when hope,

“ Seem'd as it ne'er had been, whilst every arm

“ Hung nerveless, even these, and so till now

“ Had hung, but for thy words, thy constancy, 115

“ Then think of this design, so big with fears

“ For thee and us, so hostile to the cause

“ Of Britain, tott'ring now, 'tween life and death,—

“ I should partake of something less or more

"Than human kind, if, hearing these thy words, 120
"I did not start, and with my spirit strive
"To stay thy purpose." Thus the King replied.

"ODDUNE, thy zeal doth but convince me more
"That thou art one whom men so earnest seek,
"So seldom find—a friend! that in thy heart 125
"Thou lovest well thy Country and thy King:
"But 'tis not honesty which always sees
"The secret bounds, where rashness shews itself
"And courage ends! and tho' thy heart be pure,
"Thy wisdom undisputed, yet thou know'st, 130
"Thyself too well, to think, the heavenly light,—
"Infallibility, sojourns with thee.
"Tho' to thy weigh'd and fix'd opinions
"Deff'rence be due, yet in this certain point
"With thee I differ, for to me it seems 135
"Conduct most wise to act as I have said."

Like one who on the wide sea cast away
And, in his little boat, who long has toil'd,
Till, weary, he reclines, then calls to mind
The object of his toil, and strives again; 140
So ODDUNE felt, and to the King replied.

"I can declare of wisdom, as I ought,
"It dwelleth not with me; and I have found
"This heart too fallible to trust itself
"With more than common confidence, yet hours, 145

“ And certain seasons sometimes will be found
“ When the full blaze of truth so strikes the soul,
“ And hides all doubt, that minds of modesty
“ Forget their characters, and half assume
“ The Prophet’s tone and dignity; as such 150
“ Seem I to speak: for never did I feel
“ A more fix’d certainty in mortal ways,
“ Than when I say—If thou dost deck thyself
“ In art and stratagem—If thou dost leave
“ This thy retreat, and wander far away, 150
“ Hoping to hide the countenance, that tells
“ Of unfeign’d majesty,—dare venture near
“ That enemy, the Dane, and, fondly trust
“ Good will attend it—Tis that trust I fear
“ That boads destruction, for a certain voice, 155
“ Tells me that thence, thou never shalt return!”

ALFRED replied, “ Thou may’st as well conspire
“ To stop yon sun, or, to the falling man,
“ From some high precipice, call out “ return !”
“ And think that he will heed thee, as attempt 160
“ To stop my course.” Yet ODDUNE spake once more.

“ I know that thou wilt pardon me, oh King!
“ Nor doubt the motive which to these my words
“ Gives such unwonted energy. Once more
“ Hear me and then decide. To serve the cause 165
“ We fight for, and promote thy subjects’ good,
“ In this design, doubtless hath govern’d thee;

" This is most clear. But may not all the good
" Thou hop'st to gain, some one on easier terms
" Secure for Saxons? May not one of us?— 170
" Nay, even I, go forth to calculate
" On all I see and hear—bringing thee word,
" Most faithfully. If wise to thee it seem
" Thus to assume another's character,
" And 'mid the enemy, wander unknown— 175
" The bold adventure doth so suit my mind
" And mode of thought, that I would fain implore,
" Most earnestly, this proof of confidence.
" I must not, cannot be denied!"

Like one—

A blushing maid, who, when she hears the name 180
Dear to her heart, appears to hear it not,
And rather than repeat her True-love's name,
Would wander far about. So ALFRED seem'd
'Till, calling up his courage, thus he spake.

" ODDUNE, one motive I had vow'd to keep 185
" Conceal'd from every heart; but these thy words
" So probe my spirit, and on what I say
" Such absence of all meaning cast, that I,
" To satisfy myself that I am one
" Who hath some meaning, must declare the truth—
" Is there not one among the danish camp,
" Think thee, most dear?" Instant in other light,
ODDUNE the once mysterious subject saw.
ALFRED continued, " These thy arguments

" Clearly are fraught with wisdom, and my heart—
 " My understanding feels their cogency;
 " But thou hast dived too deeply in that gulf—
 " The human mind, not to acquaint thyself,
 " That frigid reason but assumes the reins
 " When passion leaves them. I must seek the spot,
 " Where she abides, and fain would I persuade
 " This heart, that of the bold experiment
 " Some good may follow."

ODDUNE saw how weak

The power of language to oppose the will
 Fix'd and determin'd, and objection more 205
 Forbore to urge. When thus he spake: " What name,
 " What character would'st thou assume, to keep
 " Far off, suspicion? for, as well thou know'st,
 " Should Danes suspect thee, tho' their mother earth
 " Sent from her deepest cave, a warning voice 210
 " To save thee from perdition—Thou would'st die!"

" This do I know," cried ALFRED, " but in vain
 " The thought assaults me. I am bent, and now
 " Prudence must govern what it might not teach.
 " What character would I assume, dost ask?— 215
 " The HARPER! for my fingers well can touch
 " Its gentlest strings, and bid each list'ner feel
 " The soul of harmony."

ODDUNE replied,

" If thou art fix'd indeed, no better name
 " May'st thou assume. But then thy dress! A thought

" Darts through my mind. As yester eve I roam'd
 " Far through this wood, near me I spied a hut,
 " Green as the leaves that shaded it, and half
 " Screen'd by the boughs. When first I saw its shape,
 " It seem'd to me that nothing likelier look'd 225
 " To simple cottage; and, as thus I thought,
 " My doubts were realized! for at the door
 " There stood a man. I saw him and approach'd,
 " To ask his name and calling. Dost thou wish
 " To hear the stranger's answer?" ALFRED cried,
 " Speak on!" When thus he spake:

" The man I saw,
 " He was an aged woodman; apt to dwell
 " With fondness on the tale of other times,
 " Yet not obtrusive; and his words declar'd
 " The thoughtful rustic. Hoary were his locks, 235
 " And flowing, and the language of his eye
 " So mild, that it was plain his wants were few,
 " And that his spirit with the world had borne
 " Small intercourse. I never shall forget
 " The feelings that along my heart-strings ran, 240
 " When, looking round his cottage, I perceived
 " So many comforts. On a flow'ry bank
 " It stood, and by its side there ran a stream
 " So clear and sweet, and with its bubbling noise
 " So soothing, that it seem'd a paradise 245
 " For all of wise desires.

" In earlier days,
 " He knew to work, and round his cot had made

“ A grassy plat, most lovely. There was found
“ The blameless food, which Nature to her sons
“ Gives bountiful, for there were herbs and roots, 250
“ And he was deeply skill'd in healing lore,
“ And knew the parts and properties that gave
“ Health and good cheer. When he beheld me first,
“ He started back, and look'd as it were long
“ Since he had seen a human countenance. 255
“ 'Twill make thee smile when I relate my tale!
“ When to his cot he saw me hastening, firm,
“ He stood against the door-post, and uprais'd,
“ Weak in his trembling hand a rusty sword,
“ And seem'd to bid defiance: then I saw, 260
“ Within the hut, a woman, like himself,
“ Laden with years, and she too had a staff,
“ Which from the ground she raised, as she would aid
“ Her bolder husband. Seeing this, I stretch'd
“ My hand to greet them. First the old man frown'd,
“ Then, on the earth his doughty weapon cast,
“ And forward came to give me the true grasp
“ Of kindred fellowship. I enter'd in;—
“ And there simplicity and comforts too
“ Abounded, for I saw—But wherefore thus 270
“ Speak I of simple joys each cottager
“ Through Britain's wide domain might boast, if Danes
“ Spared their low dwellings. This I meant to say.
“ Beside his chimney hearth I saw a harp,
“ Perfect and comely. If thou yet resolve 275
“ To act this part, I pray thee come with me,

"And the old man shall lend thee his good harp,
"And garb so needful." "Instant," said the King.
"Let us depart!" When both together sought
The distant woodman.

After patient toil; 280
They reach'd the door and enter'd. O'er the fire,
That gave its cheerful blaze, the aged pair
Sat musing and, 'mid many a lengthen'd pause,
Something remark'd, perchance the season dull,
With other converse, such as innocence 285
And rest might furnish.

As the old man raised
His glimmering eye to mark who touch'd the latch,
He saw the Chief who on the former day
Had enter'd, and beside him one unknown.
"Welcome to this low cot!" he joyful cried, 290
And up to ODDUNE came full courteously,
And grasp'd his hand; then, turning to the King,
Welcom'd him o'er and o'er, as tho' the words
Oft told, new sense convey'd, and better shew'd
The master's hospitality. The King 295
Spoke to him thus:

"You have a tranquil place,
"Good father in this wood! If well I deem,
"Content dwells with you. Am I right old man?"
"Aye very right, good warrior! I have thrived
"Long in this glen, and every day I live 300
"Makes me more cheerful."

ALFRED thus replied;

"Your health is good!" "Truly! a healthier man,
"Throughout the country, lives not to enjoy
"Heaven's bounty. When a boy my father cried, 305
"Hear what my father told me. Rise betimes!
"Be frugal! fear not work! and, never drink
"Aught but this brook." 'Twas there when he was young,
"And still beside my cottage on it runs,
"I know not where, nor whence! nor of it heed 310
"So that it serve my purpose. There it is,
"And finer water never quench'd the thirst
"Of weary traveller. These words I heard,
"When young, and used to listen and forget
"All things alike, but how, I cannot tell
"They seem'd to strike me."

"Husband!" cried the Dame,
"These warriors brave, heed not the tale of thine
"So often told. What is the brook to them?"

Cried ALFRED, "Mother, stay! we do indeed
"Regard thy husband's story. Speak thee on!"
The woodman answer'd, "Well if I may speak,
"They seem'd to strike me, and from that good hour,
"Down e'en to this, I often think of them,
"For I have found the words so true, that now,
"Were my son living, I should say the same
"When death approach'd me."

"Had'st thou then a son?"
"Not living?" ALFRED cried. "What caus'd his death?"
The old man wiped his eye, and said, "I thought

" Never again the story to have told;
 " But as I like thy countenance, and seem 330
 " Free in discourse—why thou shalt have the tale.
 (When from her seat the aged woman rose
 And pass'd the door)
 " A hopeful son was mine!
 " He never paid the bad man's penalty!¹

¹ " By the laws of the Anglo-Saxons, certain prices were set upon all the members of the human body, and upon bruises, maims and wounds in every part of it, according to their length, breadth and depth, with a great degree of accuracy and minuteness. These prices were formed into a kind of book of rate, which every judge was obliged to get by heart, before he could sit in judgment. When any person was convicted of having wounded another, the judge declared out of the doom-book, the price of a wound of such a dimension, in such a part of the body; and this the criminal was obliged to pay to the person wounded; and by a law of king Edmund, it was declared that no abatement could be made. A compensation could be made for even murder itself, each man from the prince to the beggar having an established price, which was called his WERE or WEREGYLD, one half of which was to be paid to the family of the murdered person, as a compensation for the loss of his relation, and the other half to the public for the loss of a member of the community; so that the principle of the Saxon law was, " that there was no crime which might not be expiated with money." This principle of jurisprudence was common in most parts of Europe, except, that different values were set in different kingdoms and provinces on the same offence; but when an individual removed from one place to another, his life and limbs continued to be valued at the same rate they had formerly been; and any injury that was done by him, was compensated according to the laws of his native country, and not according to those of the country in which he resided. This gave those persons who removed from a rich country into a poor one, much greater, and those who removed from a poor country into a rich one, much less, security for their lives, limbs, and properties. The nose of a Spaniard, for example, was perfectly safe in England, because it was valued at thirteen marks; but the nose of an englishman ran a great risk in Spain, because it was valued at only twelve shillings; and on the contrary an englishman might have broken a welshman's head for a mere trifle; but few welshmen could afford to return the compliment." Christianity undermined and at length totally abolished these unjust and inadequate laws. The following are some of the laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent.

1. Let him that killeth a man in the city of an earl, be amerced in twelve shillings.
2. If a man catch another by the hair let him pay fifty sextas.
3. If the bone of the leg appear, let him make a compensation of three shillings.
4. If the shoulder be lamed, let him compensate it with twenty shillings.
5. If he be made deaf of an ear, let it be compensated with twenty-five shillings.
6. If the ear be clipped off, be it compensated with six shillings.
7. If the nose be bored through, let nine shillings compensate it.

" Or stopp'd the flying criminal all pale:²

335

" I loved him, he was dutiful and good.

" This was the cause that made him leave his home:

" To the far-distant church he once had gone,

" 'Twas of a Sunday, and he went to hear

8. If both nostrils be slit, let each be compensated with six shillings.

9. If the eye be struck out, let fifty shillings compensate for it.

10. Let him that cutteth off the chin-bone make a compensation of twenty five shillings.

11. Let each of the fore teeth be compensated with six shillings, for the one that stands next four shillings, for the next three shillings, and for each of the rest, one.

12. If the thumb be cut off, let the compensation be twenty shillings; the nail of the thumb, with three shillings; the fore-finger, with eight shillings; the middle finger with four shillings, the ring-finger with six shillings, the little finger with eleven shillings. For each nail one shilling.

13. For the least blemish, three shillings; for the greater ones, six shillings.

14. If any one give another a blow on the nose with his fist, let him pay three shillings.

15. If a man's thigh be broken, let twelve shillings be the recompence.

16. If a rib be broken, let it be compensated with three shillings.

17. If the foot be cut off, with fifty shillings.

18. If the great toe be cut off, with ten shillings.

Among the laws of the welsh kings there was one penalty for *striking* the queen.

² It was deemed a great crime to stop any criminal who was flying to a place of sanctuary.

" As a fierce and unpolished people are apt to resent any offence with instantaneous and excessive violence, the first legislators of almost all nations have adopted the humane law of appointing certain places of refuge; and giving authority to persons of the highest rank and greatest power, to defend all persons who put themselves under their protection from immediate violence. The king's court, and all churches were declared sanctuaries by the Anglo-Saxon laws, and criminals who fled to them were protected from violence for a certain time, that they might have an opportunity of making satisfaction for the injuries which they had done, and with compromising with those whom they had offended. By the same laws, kings and bishops had authority to defend those criminals who put themselves under their protection, for nine days, and abbots and aldermen for three days, but if they did not make satisfaction within that time, they were to be brought to justice, and punished according to law." At Hexham in Northumberland there was a sanctuary of a peculiar kind, it was called the *Stool of Peace*. " This spot had the privilege of a sanctuary, which was not merely confined to the church, in which stood the stool of peace, but extended a mile four ways, and the limits each way were marked by a cross. Heavy penalties were levied on those who dared to violate this sanctuary, by seizing on any criminal within the prescribed bounds; but if they presumed to take him out of the stool, the offence was not redeemable by any sum, and the offenders were left to the utmost severity of the church, and suffered excommunication, in old times the most terrible of punishments.

" The preaching and exchange some bows and darts³
 " For clothes then needed. When, as night came on,
 " He reach'd our home. I never saw a face
 " So changed, an eye so wild, so fix'd a look
 " Of something that within seem'd hard to say.
 " His mother cried (the aged woman there 345
 " Sitting so still on yonder stone) she cried,
 " What ails thee? son! Speak, for I fear me much,
 " Harm hath pursued thee!" No he said, no harm
 " To me, but there is harm enough abroad.—
 " Have ye not heard the news? No said we both.
 " This was his answer:

" I do fear for ye,
 " My parents! for o'er Saxon ground there roam
 " Bands of fierce men, so fierce, that had one told,
 " A stranger this my tale, ye straight would cry,
 " It cannot be! In truth 'tis hard to think 355
 " That such men live! You late beheld me go
 " To church, with arrows, and well-temper'd bows,
 " And darts: but oh most piteous was the sight,
 " No church was there!—It was a ruin'd pile!
 " And 'tween the walls yet standing, there arose 360

³ " Weekly fairs, among the Anglo-Saxons, were commonly held of a Sunday, and in the parish churches, the reason for which was, that the people might have an opportunity of procuring necessities for the ensuing week, when they came together for the purposes of religion. But this mixture of secular and religious affairs having been found inconvenient in many respects; at the council of Grantania, convened by Athelstan in the year 928, it was ordained that fairs and markets should no longer be held on the Lord's-day; and from that time, fairs were appointed to be held on Saturdays, and near the church, not in it, that those who came from a distance might have an opportunity of attending divine service the day after, if they chose it."

“ Columns of smoke. I wist not what it meant;
“ But doubting that some accident had thus
“ Destroy’d the well known house, awhile I paused,
“ Then through the darken’d arch-way pass’d.
“ The sight
“ Tho’ well accounted for, so fill’d my mind 365
“ With obscure apprehensions, that I stood,
“ Uncertain, if to enter or return
“ Back with my burden. As I ponder’d thus,
“ Silent, and listening to the rushing noise
“ Of smoke and cracking wood; I heard a groan, 370
“ Slow-drawn! More thoughtful I appear’d. Again,
“ The same heart-rending groan! It was a sound
“ That made my very blood—curdle, my limbs,
“ Quake as thou seest them now from memory.”
“ These were his words. My son then further spake.”

“ With cautious step, and trembling, I advanced,
“ And saw a monk, pale as the ashen bark,
“ Yet smear’d with blood. He raised his languid eyes
“ And turn’d them to me; when he feebly said,
“ If friend thou art, one favor do I ask, 380
“ Bring hither yonder stone, and at my head
“ Cast it in haste, for agony supreme
“ Preys on me!” Nearer to the spot I drew,
“ And looking at the man, knew well his face—
“ ’Twas father BURNULF! that good priest, who oft
“ Had told us of our duties to high Heaven,
“ And man, and often have we listen’d glad

" To hear his words, so mild, aye in the church

" Then fall'n in which he lay.

" I rais'd his head ;

" He knew me and thus spake. What is it thee? 390

" Ah never wilt thou listen more, good youth!

" To aged BURNULF! At his hour of death,

" Thou comest! Fetch yon stone, and for the past,

" Shew me this kindness!" " Never," cried my boy!

" Support thyself with what thou oft hast told 395

" Me, would support in death! And tell me straight

" What means this overthrow?"

" The priest replied,

" I will strive hard to speak, and to suppress

" Pain's influence. Thou speakest right, young man!

" 'Twas wrong! Faith should support me now! My tongue,

" Tho' parch'd and grown unwieldy, shall declare

" This woeful change, but I must tell it brief,

" My breath is short.—This ruin is the Dane's!

" From some far distant land, a wolfish race,

" Fierce and unfeeling, scorning God and Man, 405

" Have landed on our shore, and ETHELWULF,

" Our King, in vain resists them. They are fierce

" As Ocean when he raveth,⁴ and like him

" Delight in blood. They here surrounded us,

" And having forced the doors, with torch and sword,

" Rush'd in! The spoil thou seest, but beneath

" Lie my dead brethren. Me they thought, no more;

⁴ There was a superstition among the Anglo-Saxons, that the sea, in a tempest, was a monster that roared for human flesh.

“ But tho’ my limbs were crush’d, as thou may’st see,
“ I still survived, and many, like me, felt,
“ Life wavering, and with groans we fill’d the air : 415
“ But for these many hours, no groans but mine
“ Have sounded, and they too will cease, tho’ soon,
“ Not soon enough!

“ My dying words are these—

“ Oh youth, depart and arm thyself! find out
“ Thy Monarch’s standard! for, in such a cause, 420
“ ’Twere villainy to man, and insult vile
“ To Heaven above, idly to stand and gaze!
“ Go from this scene of ruin, and as once
“ I bade thee seek with all men peace and love;
“ I now command thee, with a warning voice, 425
“ To meet our foes! For whilst the Saxon arm
“ Fails to destroy them, piteous is the state
“ For all who live!”

“ The good man’s voice grew faint,

“ And now with harder labourings, distant far,
“ One from the other, he essay’d to breathe, 430
“ But difficult, when, back he stretch’d himself,
“ And died.

“ So hither, cried my son, I haste
“ To tell my resolution. Thou art old!
“ (Looking at me, who speechless stood) he said
“ And well may’st plead excuse from martial toil; 435
“ But if my arm should fail at such an hour
“ To wield the sword, and in my country’s cause,
“ Fight manfully;—if I should shun my King,

" And in this forest live inglorious
" When ruin and the enemy stalk round, 440
" I should not well deserve to be thy son."

" I need not tell ye, strangers! what my thoughts
" At this recital, and if long I paused
" Whether to bid my brave son go or stay.
" That night he left us! These were his last words.
" I go, my parents! to discharge the calls
" Of duty! but, again, I trust to see
" Your faces, glad, and round our frugal board
" Talk of past perils." Then he left our home!

" And hast thou never heard," the King replied,
" Of this thy son?" " No," answer'd the old man. 450
" For many years I never went to rest
" But in my dreams I saw him; yet, that time,
" Now is gone by, and I am pleased to think,
" Tho' dead, he perish'd, fighting for his King.—
" Forgive these tears!"

ALFRED replied, " Old man!
" Thou hadst not well deserved so good a son,
" If thou could'st think, unmoved, upon his death."

" He was a hopeful son," the woodman cried;
" Duteous and kind, from early youth the same,—
" His buds were blossoms. Never mortal left 460
" This lower earth, better prepared to pass
" Death's scrutiny."

"He was a noble son!"

The King replied. "Aye master he was good"—

The woodman said. "But I shall see him yet!

"This is my joy; and 'tis a joy so great, 465

"That for it I can bear to live, what time

"High Heaven sees fit.

"The world is dead to me!

"I never taste its sorrows, nor desire

"To share its pleasures. Here we spend our time,

"Far from mankind, and all the false parade 470

"Of mortal life. Here every morn and eve

"We look to God, and sing his praises, fired

"With holy gratitude; for here our eyes

"Behold earth's changes: night preceding morn,

"And morn the night, in long succession; spring 475

"And all the seasons, in an endless course,

"Moving around us, bidding us arise

"And praise our Maker, who from nothing call'd

"This wonderous world; and pleasant is the thought

"Of many words, once heard in that fair church, 480

"Now fall'n, which rais'd my mind to those good things,

"When to be heard again? Ah tell me when!"

"Good friend!" said ALFRED, "soon I trust that church

"And many other holy piles around⁵

⁵ Alfred expended a great part of his income in building and endowing religious houses. He built the monastery of Æthelney, the monastery of Shaftsbury, the monastery of Winchester; and contributed to the support of almost all the religious houses in England, Wales, and Ireland, accordingly as their necessities required. He was also a great benefactor to the abbey of Glastonbury as well as to that of Wilton, and the founder of numerous houses for the

" Will bless this land, and others learn, like thee, 485
 " Where dwells their confidence. But let me ask,
 " Father! how cam'st thou here? These words of thine
 " Speak not a woodman's mind."

The old man said,

" I am a woodman; here my father dwelt,
 " And here have I; and if my words bespeak 490
 " Other than rustic's mind, it is that one—
 " A HERMIT, near, abides—an aged man,
 " Well skill'd in mysteries of many kind,—
 " Who to great Rome hath gone on pilgrimage.⁶
 " From him I learn'd, all that I speak of good, 495
 " And more; and dear will be his memory
 " When he is dead and gone! From dwelling thus,
 " In one long quietness, our minds have learn'd
 " True wisdom, by believing Happiness
 " Confin'd to no one spot may e'en be found, 500

instruction of youth throughout the whole of his kingdom. He rebuilt and repaired all the cities and towns, together with the parish churches which had been destroyed by the ravages of the Danes at different periods; he also founded the university of Oxford, as mentioned in a former note.

6 " The Anglo-Saxons placed much of their religion in performing pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and other places, both at home and abroad, that had obtained the name of extraordinary sanctity. These pilgrimages, especially to Rome, were enjoined upon sinners as the most satisfactory penances for the greatest crimes, and recommended to saints as the most acceptable service to God. Few pious persons of any rank in those times could die in peace, or think themselves sure of heaven, till they had kissed the pope's toe, and visited the pretended sepulchres of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rome. " I had been told (says Canute the great) that the apostle Peter had received great authority from the Lord, and that he held the keys of heaven; and therefore I thought it absolutely necessary to secure his favour by a pilgrimage to Rome." For such reasons, kings, queens, nobles, prelates, monks, nuns, saints and sinners, wise men and fools, were impatient to undertake these religious journeys, and all the roads between Rome and England, were constantly crouded with english pilgrims."

" With virtue, in this cottage. Here our days
 " Pass on unruffled, and, 'till death draw nigh,
 " Here be our resting place."

When, in new tone,
 The woodman thus again. " Pardon my words!
 " I never roam to learn what tidings strange 505
 " Earth teems with, but a lingering wish to know
 " How runs the world on some great scale
 " And interest large, makes me inquire of you
 " What news abroad."

ALFRED replied, " Old man !
 " To tell thee of the state of human things, 510
 " Might leave thy spirit, not as it now is—
 " Peaceful and calm. Thy race is almost run,
 " And fit it is, that thou should'st never more
 " Meddle with earthly ways. Here rest awhile,
 " Most happy in thine ignorance. Old man! 515
 " One favour would I ask. Lend me I pray
 " Yon Harp⁷ which by thy hearth I see. Again
 " I will return it safe."

The woodman cried,
 " Warrior, 'tis thine! I lend it with good will;
 " But I must say to thee—preserve it safe! 520

⁷ " The harp was the favourite musical instrument of both the Saxons and Danes. Those who played upon the harp were admitted into the highest company, and treated with the most distinguished respect wherever they appeared. Other musical instruments were known at this period. Venerable Bede, in his treatise on music, says, " The instruments of practical music are either natural or artificial; the natural instruments are, the lungs, the throat, the tongue and the pallet; the artificial instruments are, the organ, the violin, the harp, the atola, the psaltery, the trumpet, the tabor, the pipe, and the flute."

" It was my son's! He many an hour hath sat
 " Upon yon verdant bank, and, as the sun
 " Slowly declined, so cheerily hath play'd;
 " With midnight songsters, making the far wood
 " Ring with their melody, that I had hoped 525
 " This one memorial of more happy days
 " Long to have kept; but in thy countenance
 " There is so much of what my son once was—
 " That I must lend it thee!"

" Thank thee! old man,"

ALFRED replied. " This harp I well will keep, 530
 " And prize it truly: ever when beheld
 " Thinking of thee, and of the anxious care
 " Thou hast again to see it. One request,
 " More would I make. It is an honest cause
 " For which I ask thy favour. I am bound 535
 " To look the character I do not seem—
 " Many to serve. Hast thou no worn-out garb
 " To lend me?"

" Yes!" the woodman cried, " my son's!
 " His mantle shall be thine!"

And now the King
 Stood in his rustic dress. He took the Harp 540
 And having touch'd its strings, the old man danced
 So merrily, his eye with rapture shone,
 And every note a sympathetic chord
 Awoke within, rousing his dormant soul.
 When ALFRED stopp'd and to the woodman spoke.
 " My time is short, I now must bid adieu,

“ With grateful heart, for many a lesson taught
 “ And truth received—Old man, awhile, farewell!”
 The King then pass’d the threshold.

From the stone

At which the mother mused her sorrowing mind, 550
 She heard the harp—so long neglected, sounds
 That made her raise her head and listening sit;
 ’Till, by the voice inspired, she seized her staff,
 And totter’d toward her dwelling.

As the King

Came from the door, “ My son! my son!” she cried,
 “ My long lost son!” and eager clasp’d his hand,
 When recollection came! Her grasp relax’d!
 She look’d upon the King, and, pale, exclaim’d,
 “ That face is not my son’s! God prosper thee
 “ For this delusion!”

To her cottage near 560

She moved. When, parting with his faithful friend,
 To seek the danish camp ALFRED set off,
 Clad in his new attire^s, and on his back
 Bearing the harp.

No common look was his!

^s Both music and poetry were much admired and cultivated by the Anglo-Saxons. “ The halls of all the Saxon kings, princes, and nobles, rang with the united sound of the poet’s voice and the musician’s harp. The poet and the musician were most commonly the same person, who, blessed at once with a poetical genius, a tuneful voice, and skilful hand, sung and played the song which he had composed. Talents so various and delightful were objects of ambition to the greatest monarchs, and procured the meanest who possessed them, both riches, honors, and royal favour. ALFRED THE GREAT, who united every pleasing to every great accomplishment, excelled as much in music as he did in war; and ravished his enemies with his harp, before he subdued them with his sword. “ Not long after, (says William of Malmesbury)

A stately aspect, dignified, yet mild, 565
 Declared the Monarch; and tho' half conceal'd
 By poverty's plain garb, yet what appear'd
 Told who he was. As doth the broken Bow,
 Shining in Heaven's wide vault, when some dark cloud,
 Obtrusive, glides between, and to the eye 570
 Yields but one half his glory.

Toward the Danes

ODDUNE beheld him pass! when, to himself,
 Sorrowing he cried. "No more shall I behold
 "Thy face, oh King! Destruction thou hast sought,
 "And thou wilt find it! yet, thy fame shall reach 575
 "The distant time! For thee th' enraptured Scald
 "Shall strike the harp, and tell posterity
 "Of ALFRED'S worth, who, in the years of darkness,
 "Rose like a star miraculous, and spread,
 "O'er earth, a light, that when this age hath pass'd—
 "Nay, age on age down to the farthest time,
 "Still shall be visible!"

He watch'd the King,

"Till in the mellow'd distance he was lost.
 And when he thought of all the secret snares,
 The dangers and dismays that throng'd his path— 585
 The pitfalls and the unsuspected wiles;
 He felt as sorrowful, as doth the father
 Who, many a long year to the son beloved,

Alfred adventured to leave his hiding-place, and gave a proof of his great wisdom and dexterity. For taking his harp in his hand, and pretending to be a poet and musician, he entered the enemy's camp. Being admitted into the royal tent, he entertained the danish generals with his songs and music, and thereby had an opportunity of gaining all the intelligence he desired."

BOOK XIII.

265

Hath told of virtue and her charms, and mark'd,

Upon his cheek, the glow of emulous worth:

590

Then, at the hour of separation, sees

His son go forth, into an evil world,

Where quick-sands are, and where the whirlpool, deep,

Lurks to o'erwhelm the innocent.

He sigh'd,

And to the distant castle urged his way.

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END OF BOOK XIII.

ALFRED. BOOK XIV.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED's Visit to the Danish Camp.

CAUTIOUS and slow the royal harper moved
Toward Kenwith's castle. One so used to feel
The hard earth's pillow, dreaded not the hour
Of midnight drawing near. He saw the sun
Cradled in clouds, resplendent, slowly sink 5
'Mid ocean's wave, scarce seen, whose bosom heaved
With gentle perturbation, as rude Night
Assumed his empire, and with tyrant sway
Usher'd his stormy reign.

As morn appear'd,
ALFRED arose refresh'd, and journey'd on, 10
Contemplating the future, with its host
Of grand events, ideal, but in which
The soul partook. Now on a hill he stood,
When, in the plain beneath, Kenwith he saw,

And near, th' encamped Danes! A sudden chill 15
Rush'd through his blood. "These feelings," cried the King,
"Nature must own! they spring not from my will,
"I know them not, their name, nor whence they came."

Yet ALFRED felt, whilst gazing at the Danes,
Like one, who, on a distant voyage bent, 20
Leaves friends and parents, travelling stout of heart,
Who never yet the ocean wide hath seen
And when he spies the world of waters, starts,
And for a moment, thinks, how better far
To rest at home in quietness, 'till grown 25
Familiar with the sight, fearless of harm,
His soul again returns.

Whilst gazing thus
A noise he heard, and, looking round, beheld
A hostile band of Danes—approaching fast.
When from his back the King his Harp took down, 30
And play'd most merrily, making the birds
Upon their wings move slow, or perch around
On bush or tree, to catch one passing note
With which to charm the ear of lonely man,
List'ning so earnest, that he half forgets 35
The woes that made him lonely. Near they came,
When ALFRED ceas'd his tune, bending profound.
The danish leader cried aloud,

"Young man !

"But for that instrument, thou had'st ere this

"Grappled with death. Who art thou? what thy name?

"Or this sword shall with thy heart's-blood play!"

ALFRED replied, " I am a wandering man,
 " Honest, tho' poor, and used with this good Harp
 " To play as late ye heard me. Would you more,
 " Of music, hear?" " Aye, play!" exclaim'd the Dane.
 The King then touch'd his Harp with such sweet notes
 Of tenderest minstrelsy, that the warm tear,¹
 Each iron-hearted Dane within his eye,
 Felt start. One cried, "'Tis well, now play again,"
 When ALFRED with a bolder finger swept 45
 The sounding string, and roused the martial soul²
 In all who heard, making their wild eyes glare,—
 Their limbs, in frantic attitude dance round,

¹ "The songs of the Scalds, especially when accompanied with the harp, are said to have produced the most wonderful effects, and to have roused or soothed the most impetuous passions of the human mind. Revenge rages with the greatest violence in the hearts of warlike fierce barbarians, and is of all their passions, the most furious and ungovernable; and yet it has often been subdued by the enchanting power of poetry. Egill a famous poet of old times, had quarrelled with Eric king of Norway; and in the course of that quarrel had killed the king's son, and several of his friends; which raised the rage of Eric to the greatest height. Egil was taken prisoner, and sent to the king. No sooner was he brought into the presence of the enraged monarch, who had in his own mind doom'd him to the severest tortures, than he began to sing a poem which he had composed in praise of the king's virtues, and conveyed his flattery in such sweet and soothing strains, that they procured him not only the forgiveness of all his crimes, but even the favour of his prince.

² There was a certain Scald in the court of Eric king of Norway, who boasted that he could raise and inflame the human heart to any degree he pleased. The king, partly by promises and partly by threats, prevailed upon the Scald much against his will, to make the same experiment on him and his courtiers. The Scald began by singing such mournful strains, and playing in such plaintive tones, that the whole company were overwhelmed with sorrow, and melted into tears: by and by he sang and played such joyous and exhilarating airs, that they forgot their sorrows, and began to laugh, and dance, and shout, and give every demonstration of the most unbounded mirth: at last changing his subject and his tune, he poured forth such loud, fierce and angry sounds, that they were seized with the most frantic rage, and would have fallen by mutual wounds, if the guards, at a signal given, had not rushed in and bound them: but, unhappily, before the king was overpowered, he killed no fewer than four of those around him."

"Till, fearful for himself as well as harp,
Sudden he stopp'd. When the same leader cried, 50
Raising his sword,

"Thou art a Saxon man!

"Unused are we to let such pass unharm'd,
"And doubtful now I stand, whether to spare,
"Or with this sword destroy thee." ALFRED then
Sudden his Harp uplifted, and began 55
A mild and soul-subduing song, of one,
A shepherd youth who loved a shepherdess—
'Mid winter's snows, fated one grave to find.

"Sweet is thy song, young Harper, cried the Dane,
"But thou art yet a Saxon!" As the King 60
Again uprais'd his Harp—the haughty foe
Stopp'd him and cried, "Forbear! now answer me
"In words, I scorn thy melody! Young man,
"Say, whence thou cam'st! and as thou valu'st life,
"If ought thou know'st of ALFRED, or what path, 65
"ODDUNE his Chief pursued."

When thus the King:

"I am a simple Harper, and I love
"My harp so well,—so little do I heed
"The bustling world and all the strifes of men,
"That, wandering unconcern'd, I know no care, 70
"But to preserve my Harp and sit at ease."

"Answer my words," exclaim'd the angry Dane.
"Know'st thou of ALFRED? of his place, and state?"

When, unconcern'd, again the King replied ;
 " In wandering o'er this land, I sometimes hear 75
 " Of him you ask for—is he not our King?"
 " A simple fellow," cried a Dane. " Forbear!
 " Let him pass on. From him we nought can learn,
 " And, 'tis most manifest, can nothing fear."
 When they moved onward.

ALFRED saw them go, 80
 And felt like one—a northern mariner,
 Who, sailing near that vortex, far renown'd
 Through all the Arctic, finds, half wild with dread,
 His vent'rous bark, check'd in her bold career,
 And moving toward the fatal gulf, that roars 85
 Loud in his hearing; whilst no gale appears
 To check th' inevitable fate, and fast,—
 Fast and more fast, the vessel moves to death!
 When, rushing through the clouds, the wind is heard!
 And soon it fills the sails, and while his eye 90
 Gazed on destruction, bears him safe away.

A secret dread now came upon the King.
 He saw one peril past, and tho' he strove
 To dissipate all fear, he could but view,
 That morning, as a presage of worse ills, 95
 Approaching fast. Contemplating he stood,
 And to himself in serious mood thus spake:
 " This hour my life is spared, from unlook'd cause,—
 " Sudden deception! May it not succeed
 " Hereafter? 'Tis a garb I have not worn! 100

" Yet, when my country calls for sacrifice,
" Shall I deny her? Heaven vouchsafe its aid !
" This be my plan! Hence meet I undismay'd,
" All perils and all circumstance!"

He now

Drew near the foe, and when he saw their tents, 105
And knew that he was mark'd by Danes, he cried,
" Danger before me stands, but death behind."

He pass'd the centinel, who saw his harp
Nor doubted danger. Through the ranks he sped,
Like one who business sought. Now bolder grown,
He on his harp play'd cheerily, and soon,
Full many a Dane around the minstrel stood,
And listen'd joyous, when, one cried aloud,
" Is not this man a Saxon? Dreads he not
" The danish camp?" Another thus replied : 115
" A Saxon truly, but a man who cares,
" For neither Dane or Saxon; thee or me,
" So he may eat and live."

His cheerful song

Now ALFRED ceaesd,—and as the custom was,
Like humble suppliant, of the listeners round 120
Ask'd slender pittance.

" What would'st thou receive?"

One pleasantly inquired; " We have our swords,
" And bucklers and good darts, that thee could strike
" When at great distance. But if ought beside
" Thou of us seek, first play again."

The King, 125

Striving to gain their smiles by courtesy,
 Heard, and his harp to other cadence strung;
 Then look'd for recompence. The frowning Dane
 Seized his long beard, and cried, "Thou wand'ring knave!
 "Ask only for that instantaneous death 130
 "Thou well deserv'st." When grasping the King's harp,
 He would have dash'd it down, but ALFRED cried,
 "Take not a poor man's bread! his only store,
 "With which he cheats his sorrows. Yield that harp
 "Useless to thee, to me most dear."

The Dane, 135

As ALFRED spake, to banter with his smiles,
 Awhile forbore, and when the King had ceased
 Upraised again his arm. That instant pass'd
 GUTHRUM the danish Chieftain. Near he came,
 And viewing well the instrument, inquired, 140
 Who own'd it, and the cause of that sad voice,
 Which struck his ear.

ALFRED beheld the Chief,
 And drawing near, replied, kneeling to earth,
 "It is thy servant's! Pity me my Lord!
 "A stranger, and to me restore yon harp!" 145
 "Who art thou?" cried the Dane, "wherefore come here?"

"I am a simple man," the King replied,
 "Who loves sweet minstrelsy; and oft at eve,
 "In lonely wanderings, by the slow brook's side,
 "I pass my time. And when the stars are up, 150

" And I can hear the night-birds whistling loud,
 " I touch my harp to solemn music, sounds,
 " That give the air a stillness. I have seen,
 " High in the heavens, the moon suspend her course,
 " To listen to my strains, whilst the proud trees, 155
 " So lofty over head, have hush'd their noise,
 " And only to the loud gale bent themselves,
 " When I have ceased. There is my gentle harp,
 " And if I ne'er should gain it, I must roam,
 " Mourning, this land about; or, in a bark, 160
 " Sail up and down the ocean evermore,
 " And when the stars of night, shoot their red balls;
 " Fly after them, and ere their flight hath ceased,
 " Seize, and direct their unextinguish'd course
 " To him who robb'd me."

GUTHRUM cried, "Poorman!

" A wand'ring Lunatic that here hath stray'd
 " Unconscious. Instant yield the harp, oh Dane!
 " For tho' we war on Saxons, we will spare
 " Whom gods have warr'd on." ALFRED took the harp,
 And bending to the Chief most gratefully, 170
 His way pursued.

Careful he look'd around,
 And mark'd the Danes, their number, and their state
 Of martial discipline; proud in their force,
 Of vict'ry confident, incautious grown,
 And scorning their weak foes.

Now of his Queen 175
 He thought, and that her ear might catch some sound

Of him, her Lord, he touch'd the harp, and thus,
 Sang as he play'd. "Oh thou my soul's desire,
 "Where'er thou art, come forth and let me see
 "Thy long-lost countenance."

The men who stray'd,
 With the wild harper, heard, and thus exclaim'd:
 "He calleth now the moon, but he shall call
 "For many an hour, ere from her distant course,
 "She answer him." The King his song pursued.

"Life of my life and spirit pure as heaven, 185
 "Come forth and see thy minstrel! Sick at heart,
 "He wanders through the sea and earth and air
 "To meet thy glance beloved! Look around,
 "And ease his heart, who never joy hath felt
 "Since thou did'st leave him. From the clouds above,
 "Peep out, beloved! from yon purple cloud,
 "Behold me faithful still, nor let me more,
 "Wander through earth in lonely misery."

Now to the gate he came and would have pass'd,
 But one resisting said, "Stranger! thy name?" 195

"My name," replied the King, "is with the moon,
 "And sun and stars. Upon the rainbow bright,
 "Laughing I stride, and when the night is come,
 "Upon the beach I roam, to pick the shells,
 "Or on the star-fish read my name, and sing, 200
 "How I was young and loved a beauteous maid

" Whose eyes were black."

One drawing near them said,

" A wand'ring Lunatic, whom GUTHRUM'S self

" Bade us respect." Then through the gate he pass'd,
Harping and chaunting cheerily, whilst crouds 205

Fast follow'd him to see so strange a man.

Again he sang. " Oh show thy lovely face!

" Charmer come forth, and bless me with the sight

" So long desired. Upon yon silver cloud

" Let me behold thee, so shall endless joy 210

" Bound at my heart, and I will laugh aloud,

" And sing, as now I sing, my cares away."

When the King ceased his melancholy song,

A Damsel from the castle came, and cried:

" Harper, come hither." ALFRED heard a voice, 215

And, looking round, beheld her. At the words,

He stopp'd, leaving the croud 'mong whom he stood,

And follow'd her alone.

It was the hall

Whereto they went. She said, " Harper sing forth

" To sooth the sorrows of yon woman's heart, 220

" Who sits beside the fire—nursing her cares

" From morn'ing 'en 'till night." ALFRED look'd round,—

He saw ALSWITHA!

By the hearth she sat,

And at the fire intensely gazing, saw,

Or seem'd to see, semblance of friend beloved, 225

Nor of the harper knew, nor who, around,

Cared any thing, so she might sit and gaze
In idle contemplation.

ALFRED play'd:

She knew the tune! when casting a quick glance
At him, beside, the harper, she exclaim'd— 230
“What man art thou?” When fixing his dark eye,
Full at her, he pronounced no word. She saw!
She knew the King! and shudd'ring turn'd away,
Wrung with deep agony. The damsel saw
The sudden change of countenance both shew'd, 235
The terror, the surprise, and, as she look'd
Around the hall, grown darker from the night
Approaching slow, and saw the pale blue fire;
The shadowy world of beings rose; she seem'd
Half conscious of some intellectual strife, 240
And dim conjectures so o'erpower'd her mind
With forms and shapes ideal, that she stood,
Trembling, 'till grown suspicious of herself,
The place and all around her; from the hall
She fled precipitate.

Most like the youth, 245
Who through the church-yard roams at dead of night,
And when he to the middle path draws nigh,
Determines not to fear, yet fears the more
For all his resolutions; 'till at length
Aerial phantoms dance before his eyes, 250
And all creation leagues to stir his spirit;
When, to imagined fears resign'd, he seeks
Safety in flight, and faster for his speed

Thinks fiends pursuing.

So the damsel rush'd
From out the hall, and cried, to those without, 255
"What man is this that ye have hither brought?
"My heart doth quake." The waiting band replied,
"It is a Saxon harper, wandering here
"In his mad fits of lunacy. No harm
"Hath he achieved?" "No harm," the damsel said,
"But I do fear again to enter there,
"Go ye and bring him forth." Then many a Dane
Rush'd in, and, looking round, the minstrel saw
Kneeling before the woman, him they brought
From out the hall. ALSWITHA saw the sight, 265
And trembled as her death-call she had heard.

Now round the King, like famish'd birds, their prey,
Crowded the Danes, to hear one other tune
Play'd by the wand'ring harper. Said the King
"I now am weary, on the coming morn, 270
"Your will, be mine; now must I rest myself."
Yet vain had been his pleadings, had not sounds,
Well known, the Danes required, instant to join
Their nightly tents. Then ALFRED stretch'd himself,
Heart-sick and weary, on the chilling ground: 275
And when the tempest of his mind seem'd hush'd,
And sleep advancing, on the midnight gale,
Shouts of loud mirth were heard, and revelry.
When ALFRED thus look'd up to Heaven, and spake:

ALFRED. BOOK XV.

SCENE—THE DANISH TENT. IVAR AND HUBBA ALONE.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED's Visit to the Danish Camp continued.

“HUBBA, restrain thy wrath!” IVAR exclaim'd,
“Nor thus indulge mad thirst of blood. Thy words
“Seem frantic! Thou dost let revenge absorb
“All thoughts, such as might best befit our minds,
“Placed in this state.” Replied the Chieftain fierce. 5

“Tho' older and entitled to receive
“Respect from me, thy brother, yet this hour
“Laughs at all duties. Let the man revolve
“On niceties of right and wrong, who lolls
“On languor's pillow, and hath never felt
“The wrongs I feel. Is HUBBA not a man?
“A prince? and owns he not a character,
“Freeborn, and prizing courage more than life?

" Rememb'rest thou thy father? how he scorn'd
 " The dastard's spirit? what he bore to gain 15
 " The hero's name? and in what flood-like wrath
 " Whelm'd each presumptuous foe? Shall I his son,
 " Of him forgetful, see another's sword
 " Hang over me, and let the greedy hour
 " Of vengeance sleep?"

" Yes!" IVAR answer'd, "Sleep!
 " Forever sleep!—My mind misgives itself!
 " I see this kindling spirit, and suspect
 " All is not right. Thou tellest me this isle
 " Stoops to me;—that the vanquish'd Saxons flee
 " On every side. How canst thou reconcile, 25
 " That, conquering, unresisted, we should find
 " Denmark's proud fleet, soon as we reach'd this isle,
 " By flames o'erwhelm'd? To my unquiet mind
 " It ill forebodeth; and I deem our state,
 " Spite of thy words, unsafe! We have a foe, 30
 " Wary, and with mysterious plottings fill'd;—
 " Therefore more dreaded. Dost thou never hope
 " To reach thy native country, and receive
 " Some favor'd Fair, the fruit of all thy toil?

1 All the northern nations were remarkable for the respect they paid their women. A young man had no chance of being favourably received as a suitor, till he had distinguished himself in battle, and rendered himself famous for his proficiency in manual exercises. The following is the complaint of Harold, translated from an old Icelandic Poem:

1 My ship hath sailed round the isle of Sicily. Then were we all magnificent and splendid. My brown vessels, full of warriors, rapidly skimmed along the waves. Eager for the fight, I thought my sails could never slacken. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

2 I fought in my youth with the inhabitants of Drontheim. They had troops superior in

“ Check then thy wrath! It is a dragon fierce 35
 “ That will o’ercome thee, if thou scorn to heed
 “ These words.

“ I see most manifest, this isle
 “ Swells not our conquests, but, with caution deep,
 “ Zeal, and to one particular point, our aims
 “ All turn’d—the death of ALFRED! that bold man,
 “ Who keeps our swords at bay, and while unseen
 “ Laughs us to scorn; yet o’er his head there hangs
 “ Certain destruction and most full revenge.
 “ Yet, listen! if we quarrel, and divide
 “ The spirit which alone can win this land, 45
 “ How stand we then?—dishearten’d, and the prey
 “ Of these our hated foes. But I would hope,
 “ Thy mind too brave to pore on selfish wrongs,
 “ Heedless of these our people. If we fail
 “ To do our duty, and in private broils 50

number. Dreadful was the conflict. Young as I was, I left their young king dead in the fight. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

III. One day we were but sixteen on ship-board: a tempest arose and swelled the ocean. The waves filled the loaded vessel: but we diligently cleared it. Thence I formed the brightest hopes. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

IV. I know how to perform eight exercises. I fight with courage. I keep a firm seat on horseback. I am skilled in swimming. I glide along the ice on scates. I excel in darting the lance. I am dexterous at the oar. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

V. What tender maid or widow can deny, that in the morning, when, posted near the city in the south, we joined battle; can deny that I bravely wielded my arms; or that I left behind me lasting monuments of my valour. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

VI. I was born in the Uplands of Norway, where the inhabitants handle so well the bow. Now I make my ships the dread of peasants, rush among the rocks of the sea. Far from the abode of men I have ploughed the wide ocean with my vessels. And yet a Russian maid disdains me.

" Forget the common cause, what will await
" Thy father's warriors, and as brave a host
" As ever hurl'd the lance."

HUBBA replied,

" Thy words I hear, and when I GUTHRUM meet,
" My deeds shall answer thee. The time is past! 55
" Why stops he? Never long'd I more to try
" My might in battle, than I now desire
" To measure swords with GUTHRUM."

"What that noise"

IVAR exclaim'd, uprising, " to mine ear,
" Melodious music." One drew nigh and said, 60
" A Saxon harper, crazed, who here doth roam."

" A Harper ! and a Saxon ! Bid him in !"

Cried IVAR. In the hall then ALFRED came
And stood before the Danes, who sternly eyed
The Monarch, when the Chieftain IVAR spake. 65

" Saxon ! how cam'st thou here? What antidote
" Hast thou against our swords?" The King replied,

" When the black Raven caws, and in the air
" Witches and wand'ring sprites their revels keep,
" Loud-laughing, with this instrument I play 70
" As late you heard me. Saw you yester eve
" The moon, and how she oped her mouth, and sang
" To keep me chorus?" Wond'ring look'd the Danes.
ALFRED continued. " Through the ocean waves,

" I wander, and where huge Behemoth swims, 75
" So sport myself, that I am half a whale.
" What thing is that? behold it! there! a Crane?
" Nay, by my Harp, it is a witch's broom!
" The time! what is it? Ah! what art thou there?
" Sweet innocent, a child! Nay spare his tears! 80
" Come thou with me!"

When, through the door, the King
Essay'd to pass, but HUBBA cried, " Withhold!"
And thus to IVAR spake. " This frantic man
" Whence came he? his strange looks, and words so wild,
" Might check our doubts, but that I oft have found
" Reputed fools, wiser than some who boast
" High pedigree. Saxon, declare thy name!
" And if thou know'st of ALFRED."

Thus the King:

" What is my name? what is the sea-surf call'd
" At midnight? and who stops to count the sands 90
" When the waves roar? See you yon loursing cloud?
" Hear you the noise that through the elements,
" Bursts on, and makes the gazer's cheek turn pale—
" The lightnings learn to pity? Up and down,
" Up to the clouds, down to the ocean's bed, 95
" I go, and when the parted waves make bare
" The sea-rock's leaves, I tear them off in haste,
" And round my harp, bind them as now you see."

" Where is thy King? Brawler!" the Chief exclaim'd.
ALFRED replied.

" My King? under the earth. 100
 " Shall I my hand extend and bid him rise—
 " Fierce as the midnight wolf, to look at you
 " And me? Or shall I to the grave descend,
 " Or, to the depths of hell! riding on skulls,
 " Where oft I go, and with my potent word 105
 " Rouse up the earthquake?"

HUBBA cried, " Forbear!
 " Call not thy King!" when, turning, thus he said,
 " Slowly, to IVAR. " This mysterious man,
 " I like him not! ask for no other words;
 " But let him leave our tent, and with him take 110
 " Our mildest accents." IVAR thus replied :
 " Lose not thyself! tho' evil spirits walk,
 " And teaze mankind with sore perplexities,
 " This is no spirit! By his uncouth words,
 " I see the wand'ring Lunatic. His looks 115
 " Plainly tell this. But tho' he may not talk,
 " He well may play. Harper! some chearful tune,
 " To sooth our anger."

As the King his Harp
 Raised to his ear, GUTHRUM threw wide the door
 And enter'd in, vindictive. In his eye 120
 He bore fierce meaning.

With a tongue that hid
 All deadly plans, HUBBA the Chief address'd.
 " GUTHRUM, we long have waited, and thy zeal,
 " So boasted of, had taught us to expect
 " More certain proofs;—but I forget myself! 125

" I did not mean to question thy good zeal;
" As well might I suspect this heart, that now
" Beats with one purpose.

" Tho' when late we met,

" Our words ran loud, and we in idle talk
" Question'd each other's courage, and had nigh 130
" Handled our swords, yet 'twas a childish thing.
" GUTHRUM, to tell the truth, thou well didst speak!
" And since thy boyish days, thou hast been known,
" To shine far better in thy deeds than words.
" Say I not right?"

When GUTHRUM thus: "Thoudost!

" My plan is this. All others I respect,
" But I have learnt, most to respect myself;
" And never to receive from lord or slave,
" Charges, or light or heavy, but this sword
" Hath weigh'd their truth. I am content to serve
" Thee, my young Prince, as I have wont to do,
" With due allegiance; yet, there is within
" This veteran breast, a heart that reverences
" Its duties to another, and, itself.
" I am thy friend again, receive my hand!" 145

" Most willing," HUBBA cried. "We both are friends.
" GUTHRUM! we here are met to talk what now
" Best may promote our cause. I need not tell
" Thee, Chieftain! what the customs of our land,
" Preceding battle, and how well it suits 150
" Mortals to deprecate the frowns of heaven

" Ere they commence the fight. To me it seems
 " Proper to sacrifice some victim,² nay,
 " And that of human kind, thus, as beseems,
 " Pleasing the gods. What thinkest thou? oh Chief!"

GUTHRUM replied, "Most wise! some blood should flow."
 " If blood must flow," said HUBBA, "thou would'st chuse,
 " Doubtless, a victim of such sort, that gods
 " Might smile beneficent, and in our cause
 " Take more than common interest. Speak I well?"

" Truly," said GUTHRUM. HUBBA thus exclaim'd:
 " If well I speak, then, by thy patriot zeal!
 " By all the ardour, in the danish cause
 " Thou oft hast boasted! By Valhalla's halls—
 " I claim thy CAPTIVE!—Look not thus amazed! 165
 " But if sincerity thy breast hath sway'd,
 " Answer me, yes!"

" No! by the gods above!"

Cried GUTHRUM. " She shall never bleed! my word,—
 " My oath is with her, and when GUTHRUM fails
 " His promise, then shall man indeed renounce 170
 " All faith, and Surtur's reign draw near."³

Whilst rage

Prey'd on his heart, HUBBA with placid mien

² See Note 7, Book XII.

³ The Danes entertained the most dreadful apprehensions of the reign of Surtur. Surtur, the adversary of Odin, was supposed to live in a burning world, called Muspelsheim; ordained at some distant time to break loose and destroy the father of the gods. This event is thus

Thus answer'd. "GUTHRUM thou art wise and brave—
 "Thus much thy foes confess, and thou will soon, 175
 "Check this thy warmth, and see most plain, how right
 "To sacrifice this Captive. 'Tis a thing
 "So needful, and so proper, that thy mind
 "Must yield, there is no choice."

When GUTHRUM thus:

sublimely described in the Edda. "There will come a time, a barbarous age, an age of the sword, when iniquity shall infest the earth, when brothers shall stain themselves with brothers blood, when sons shall be the murderers of their fathers, and fathers of their sons, when incest and adultery shall be common, when no man shall spare his friend. Immediately shall succeed a desolating winter; the snow shall fall from the four corners of the world, the winds shall blow with fury, the whole earth shall be fettered with ice. Three such winters shall pass away without being softened by one summer. Then shall succeed astonishing prodigies. Then shall the monsters break their chains and escape: the great dragon shall roll himself in the ocean, and with his motions the whole earth shall be overflowed: the earth shall be shaken; the trees shall be torn up by the roots; the rocks shall be dashed against each other. The wolf Fenris, broken loose from his chains, shall open his enormous mouth, which reaches from heaven to earth, the fire shall flash out from his eyes and nostrils; he shall devour the sun: and the great dragon who follows him, shall vomit forth upon the waters and into the air, great torrents of venom. In this confusion the stars shall fly from their places. The heavens shall cleave asunder, and the army of evil genii and giants, conducted by black Surtur, and followed by Loke, shall break in to attack the gods: when Heimdall the door-keeper of the gods, rises up, he sounds his clanging trumpet! The gods awake and assemble; the great ash tree shakes its branches; heaven and earth are full of horror and affright. The gods fly to arms; the heroes place themselves in battle-array. Odin appears armed in his golden casque, and his resplendant cuirass; his vast scymitar is in his hand. He attacks the wolf Fenris, he is devoured by him! and the wolf perishes at the same moment. Thor is suffocated in the floods of venom which the dragon breathes forth as he expires. Loke and Heimdall mutually kill each other. The fire consumes all things, and the flame reaches up to heaven. But presently afterwards, a new earth springs forth from the bosom of the waves, adorned with green meadows; and the fields there spring forth without culture, calamities are there unknown, a palace is there raised more shining than the sun, all covered with gold. This is the place that the just will inhabit, and enjoy delights for evermore. Then the powerful, the valiant, and he who governs all things, comes forth from his lofty abodes to render divine justice. He pronounces decrees. He establishes the sacred destinies which will endure for ever. There is an abode remote from the sun, the gates of which face the north; poison rains there through a thousand openings. This place is all composed of the carcasses of serpents. There run certain torrents, in which are plunged, perjurers, assassins, and those who seduce married women. A black-winged dragon flies incessantly around, and devours the bodies of the wretched who are there imprisoned."

" No choice! I tell thee, HUBBA ! tho' thy voice
 " Came with a god's solemnity, and Heaven 175
 " Pledged thy cause; I would regard it all
 " As doth the King of Birds, the winds that roar
 " Around his dwelling. If a heart must bleed,
 " Let IVAR speak, and with a band of Danes
 " Forth will I search the country, and provide, 180
 " Hundreds like her to temporize with fate
 " For our success. But by the immortal gods!
 " By ODIN's self! my Captive shall not die."

GUTHRUM's proud speech and purpose resolute
 Added new force to HUBBA's latent ire. 185
 He cried. " Thou Cormorant of haughtiness!
 " Who gave thee grace before thy Prince to stand
 " And say what shall be? who endued thy words
 " To fix the bounds of fate, and of thyself
 " Give life and death? Thine oath—I heed it not!
 " And as the sun omnipotent now shines,
 " So shall thy Captive perish. This I swear!

GUTHRUM, with steady brow, thus answer'd: " Prince!
 " Thy wrath is great, but I will answer thee,
 " Cool, from my conscious right, not cowardice.— 195
 " Tho' nurst in wars, and mark'd with many a scar
 " From hostile sword—Tho' by thy father's side
 " I on the Lapland mountains met the foe,
 " Where the white smoke-frosts⁴ and ice-pil'd crags

⁴ In the most northern latitudes, a white smoke is observed sometimes to arise between the fissures in the ice, so intensely cold as to peel the skin of any person who approaches it. It is known by the name of *smoke-frost*.

- " Shone in their sumptuous dress, our only guide
 " The blasted Fir—some solitary tree, 200
 " That here and there appear'd 'mid nature's grave.
 " Tho' in these scenes, by REGNER's side, I fought
 " And nobly conquer'd; on the tall rock's brow,
 " Sending our feats down to posterity⁵
 " In living glory—making snows my bed, 205
 " And ice my pillow—whilst our swords were dyed,
 " In gallant blood, chieftains and warriors brave;
 " Yet thou disdainest all—these deeds are o'er!—
 " When, at thy sire's untimely death, I stood
 " First in command, I look'd around and saw 210
 " His youthful boys, and in my heart I swore
 " True fealty! Swore I then in vain? Thou know'st
 " This shield hath screen'd thee! Since to manhood's form
 " Thou camest, have I sheath'd my sword, and stood
 " An idle gazer? Have I not display'd 215
 " Spirit untamed, and in this tardy strife,
 " Stood forth in every hour, unterrified,
 " Where danger most appear'd? If this be true,
 " Such long-tried faithfulness might pride itself,
 " Or, look at least for something like a smile 220
 " Of fair complacency from thee, young Prince!
 " But thou hast lightly deem'd these services,
 " And, with a soul unworthy, dared insult
 " A hoary warrior, thou hast dared suspect

⁵ Inscriptions are still to be found on some of the highest rocks of Scandinavia, left there by the warriors of former ages, commemorating their exploits.

" My heart's integrity! Now hear me, Chief! 225
 " Tho' old in warfare, still do I possess
 " A sinewy hand that yet can grasp the sword.
 " HUBBA! I tell thee, 'till my head lie low,
 " Tho' Valhall's gods in long succession came
 " To ask this victim—never shall she fall, 230
 " Or, with her blood, GUTHRUM shall mix his own!"

" Proud dotard!" HUBBA cried, "Take thy rash words!
 " I scorn them all! For as the Bear pursues
 " The murd'rer of her young one, so will I—
 " Thy Captive! and tho' death before me stood, 235
 " Press on—such is my hate of thee! But words
 " Suit not my purpose! This triumphant sword,
 " Shall deal her death wound!" As he to the door
 Rush'd furious. GUTHRUM seiz'd him and exclaim'd,
 " HUBBA! what word was that?"

Their swords are drawn!

When IVAR sprang between and cried, " Forbear!"
 Whilst at the murd'rous man, the Harper frown'd,
 Unseen, and rais'd his harp, as he would strike,
 Unconscious what he did.

With wiser wrath,
 Each warrior sheath'd his sword, when HUBBA cried:
 " Wrongs upon wrongs, must I forever bear?
 " GUTHRUM! thy blood or mine, this foul offence
 " Alone shall heal! We will not thus with words
 " Fight always! But enough, now IVAR speak!
 " Thou art our proper leader! Now decide 250

"Between thy brother and that haughty man—

"GUTHRUM, thy country's foe."

When IVAR spake:

"To me it is portentous of all ill,

"Cut off from succour, and about to try

"Our might with ALFRED, to behold you thus 255

"With broils inglorious waste those thoughts, that zeal

"The Saxons call for. Shall we by such deeds

"Britain subdue, and to our homes return

"Laden with honors? HUBBA, thou art rash!

"GUTHRUM, too bold! Am I your leader named

"To learn my weakness, and behold your words

"Guide me, who child-like need such foreign aid?

"I am myself alone! I heed ye not—

"HUBBA NOR GUTHRUM!

"Ere the fight begin,

"'Tis meet some victim fall, and, right I deem, 260

"Thy Captive, GUTHRUM!—Is there one beside,

"A Saxon in our camp? Yea! there is one—

"Yon crazy Harper. Instant seize! his blood

"Shall stay your mutual wrath!"

HUBBA exclaim'd,

"No blood but GUTHRUM's Captive! I will have

"No blood but hers. She is the destin'd gift

"From Danes to Gods, and as thy brother lives,

"So shall she die!"

IVAR replied, "'Tis well!

"HUBBA, thou speakest right. Her blood shall flow!"

GUTHRUM then smote his breast and looking up, 270
Heard IVAR say: "But stop! To shun, myself,
" That rashness which in you so ill I deem,
" I will not now determine; when night comes,
" Then in this tent meet all! and we will speak
" Plain to this subject. As we then resolve, 275
" So shall the deed take place, for if to death
" We doom the Captive—by our torches' light,
" Forth will we lead her, and may Gods receive
" Th' appeasing blood!"

HUBBA transported cried
" This is most brave, most brotherly, most wise! 280
" IVAR, thou hast my thanks! yet one word more.
" Favor'd I feel myself, but I would ask
" An equal favor.—Let the Captive stand,
" Here in this tent, upon th' approaching eve,
" While we debate. So shall we mark her look. 285
" And feast our eyes upon her growing terrors!"

" Monster, away!" th' indignant GUTHRUM cried.
" Shame of thy race! blot of thy father's fame!
" Insult a woman? Make a Captive stand—
" One whom the wars have giv'n, and view her chains,
" Preparing at the forge?—The molten steel,
" Soon to become a dagger, through her heart
" To force its way?—Is thy name HUBBA?"

" Flames
" Light on thee! May the scorpion's venom bathe
" Ever thy soul!" the wrathful HUBBA cried.— 295

"Thou art most hateful to me! Ivar speak!
"The power is thine—thou art the strength of Danes!
"Say to yon stubborn man, who fain would grasp
"All rule himself, say to yon stubborn man—
"Thy Captive shall be present!"

Ivar cried, 300

"Thy Captive shall be present! She shall hear
"Whilst we decide."

When, brooding as the cloud
That leads the storm on, Guthrum left the tent
While Hubba follow'd; and as slowly rose
The Harper, Ivar spake: "Mark, simple man! 305
"Tho' thou dost talk so wild, thou yet canst play
"Most sweetly, and, lest boisterous words arise
"That need thy soothing—be thou here anon!"

END OF BOOK XV.

ALFRED. BOOK XVI.

SCENE—THE DANISH TENT. TIME—MIDNIGHT.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED's Visit to the Danish Camp continued.

“WELL met!” cried IVAR. “Here we all appear,
“But where the Captive? she whose fate hath caused
“This bitter strife.”

He scarce had said, when, lo!

ALSWITHA enter'd, pensive, whilst her eye,
All sorrowful, gleam'd through the christal tear. 5
She cast a wilder'd look, slow through the tent,
And as her frame was still, her heart throbb'd fast,
For there, disguised, stood ALFRED. He beheld
And trembled, every joint relax'd; such doubts
Rush'd through him, that of all around, he seem'd, 10
Dubious, if most partaking of the world
Ideal or material, as may feel
Th' unbodied spirit, that at first forsakes

This life, and mingles with the unseen world.

When HUBBA rose and cried.

“ IVAR, behold 15
 “ Yon Captive, GUTHRUM in his vain conceit
 “ Would screen from death; but, by the sword I wield,
 “ Death shall o’ertake her, and the gods receive,
 “ Before th’ approaching morn, her destin’d blood.”

The gentle Zephyr, that upon the wave
 Disports himself, and o’er the rippling flood, 20
 Delighted bears some vessel, freighted rich
 With human excellence, feels not more grief
 And cutting anguish, when, with potent word,
 The Genius of the Ocean, bids him haste
 To other regions, and resign his charge 25
 To the fierce North-wind, that with bellowing rage
 Soon shall assault the bark, and in the waves
 Ingulph the whole,—than felt the King, to think
 He govern’d not, but one, a Dane, whose soul
 Blood only charm’d.

ALSWITHA silent stood, 30
 Feeling had left her, and her eye display’d
 The vacancy of death. When GUTHRUM cried :

“ HUBBA! more black thy heart, than night, o’ercast
 “ With hideous tempests, when no moon appears,
 “ And every star, fearful, withdraws. Thy soul 35
 “ Feeds on most foul revenge, and thy dark mind
 “ Ever displays, like Finmark’s gloomy wastes,

" All desolate, winds or the beating rain.—
 " Thou hast no sun within! I know the cause
 " That makes thee GUTHRUM's foe! that fills thy breast
 " With venom fierce, and of no earthly kind :
 " But thou shalt strive in vain! She shall not die !
 " She shall not fall, to swell thy lordly pride—
 " Thy fierce resentment.

I have vow'd, have sworn,
 " Her to protect; this tongue hath pledged itself
 " With oaths so full and of such import deep,
 " That whilst this eye can see, this sword resist,
 " Yon female stands secure!"

When IVAR spake.
 " GUTHRUM, I know thee not! thy words and looks
 " So change thy character, that I suspect
 " Some ghost from hell hath borrow'd this thy shape
 " With which to spout its fury. Dost thou know
 " Who rules in Britain, GUTHRUM, or myself?
 " Thy words so rude befit not even thee, 55
 " Tho' old, and in thy country's wars renown'd.
 " If for our common good, the gods demand
 " A victim of high blood; where is there one,
 " As her I see, so proper? Hast thou not
 " Oftimes declared that from her form, and mien, 60
 " Her language and deportment, that thou knew'st
 " Thy Captive of no common origin?¹
 " These oft have been thy sayings! and to shew

¹ It was a maxim with the Danes, that, the more noble the victim, the greater the probability of pleasing the gods. See Notes 7 and 8, Book XII.

"Resentment for thy words, here do I swear,

"By all the gods in Valhall—she shall die!" 65

Not paler look'd the Babylonian King,
BELSHAZZER, when upon the walls he saw
That finger, guided by the unseen hand,
Than look'd ALSWITHA. GUTHRUM thus replied:

"With thee, oh Chieftain! vain it were to strive:

"Thou hast all power! yet do I feel my wrongs

"Hard on me! Is it this for which my life

"Hath borne the battle? Have I fought from youth,

"Even to these grey hairs, to have at last

"One little boon denied me, and receive 70

"At this unlook'd-for day, my full reward?

"One thing I yet may do! These hands have now

"Warr'd long enough; and from this fatal hour,

"Sheath'd is my sword! upon the Saxon foe,

"Never to light again! The strife is o'er! 75

"Now take the Victim! let her blood be shed!

"Go forth and conquer in full confidence

"That gods approve the deed! One path is now

"Left for old GUTHRUM, and I swear to sail

"Instant to Denmark."

HUBBA shouted, "Sail! 80

"We heed thee not—thy threats or services!

"We are a host ourselves!

IVAR exclaim'd;

"Lead forth the Victim! Bring the sacred knife!

“ Prepare the bowl! and let her streaming blood
 “ Flow to the midnight torch!”

As when some tree, 85

By winds assail'd, bends its full-foliaged brow,
 Trembling, 'till, with the Spirit of the storm—
 Whose ministers preceded, down it falls
 Prostrate on earth, ALSWITHA bent her head;
 But when she heard the sentence, “ Lead her forth!”
 Life seem'd departed! on the ground she fell,
 Senseless. When HUBBA grasp'd her arm, and forth
 Essay'd to bear her out; but IVAR cried,
 “ Forbear! I have one question first to ask.
 “ GUTHRUM, attend! Became yon Captive thine 95
 “ In lawful fight, or didst thou meet with her,
 “ When peaceful, and afar from wars and strifes?”

GUTHRUM imperfect hope received, and cried,
 “ By all the gods we serve, I found her not,
 “ Fighting, or urging on to fight,² but far 100
 “ From battle, and pursuing quietly
 “ Her sober way.”

IVAR then knit his brow:
 Conflicting thoughts seem'd labouring in his breast.

² “ When the Danes were going to join battle, they raised loud shouts, they clashed their arms, they invoked with a great noise the name of Odin, and sometimes sang hymns in his praise. The Danes made an intrenchment with their baggage round the camp, where the women and children remained during the engagement, animating their husbands, who, if they happened to be beaten, in vain fled there for refuge, the women most commonly only waited their return, in order to cut them in pieces.” The women who attended armies, were considered as sharing the fight with their husbands, and in case of a defeat were often indiscriminately slaughtered by the victorious enemy. Many instances occurred among the Danes, of women fighting gallantly by the side of their husbands.

Awhile he ponder'd; when, ALSWITHA rose,
 And gazing slowly round, spake not, yet look'd, 105
 With apprehended sternness on the Chief.
 This look awoke his wrath, that but required,
 The pressure of a shadow, to burst forth
 Untameable—Like that still pause in air,
 When the dark elements are fill'd with mists 110
 And pregnant clouds, 'till through the vaulted sky
 The thunder rattles, and the world beneath,
 Half deluged, hears the dread Contunder roar
 Which bursts heaven's flood-gates.

Thus the Chieftain cried:

"Woman! thy haughty mien, but ill deserves 115
 "Compassion, yet, it wrings me to the heart,
 "What most I hate, I fear me, I must shew."
 When lifting up her eye, ALSWITHA spake:
 "Haughty, my Lord! within this trembling breast
 "There is no haughtiness, and if thou shew 120
 "Compassion to my pleading innocence—"

HUBBA exclaim'd, "Compassion! Hold thy peace!
 "IVAR, my brother! wouldst thou rescue thus
 "A worthless Captive, and expose our heads—
 "Thy head and mine—nay all around our tent 125
 "To one o'erwhelming fate? Recal thy words!
 "Pronounce! and let me seize her and lead forth
 "To instant sacrifice."

Then such suspense

HUBBA and GUTHRUM, and the Harper felt,

And she, ALSWITHA, as that wretched crew, 130
 On India's despot shore, when, parch'd with thirst,
 And deep immured in midnight horrible,—
 Their very veins starting from out their flesh,
 And, boiling, as their dark blood flow'd within;—
 Then such suspense felt all around the Chief, 135
 IVAR, as Albion's injured sons endured,
 When having sent a second time to learn
 If still he slept, the Monster, on whose rest
 Their lives depended.³

IVAR thus replied:

³ Calcutta was taken from the English by NABOB SURAJAH DOWLA in the year 1756.
 "As soon as it was dark the british prisoners, to the number of 146, were directed by the Jemmidars, who guarded them, to collect themselves into one body, and sit down quietly under the arched Veranda or Piazza, to the westward of the *Black-hole Prison*. Besides the guard over them, another was placed at the south-end of this Veranda, to prevent the escape of any of them. About five hundred gunmen, with lighted matches, were drawn up on the parade, and soon after the factory was in flames to the right and left of the prisoners, who had various conjectures on this appearance. The fire advanced with rapidity on both sides; and it was the prevailing opinion of the english, that they were to be suffocated between the two fires, on this they soon came to the resolution of rushing on the guard, seizing their scymitars, and attacking the troops on the parade, rather than be thus tamely roasted to death: but Mr. Holwell the governor advanced and found the moors were only searching for a place to confine them in. Soon after the guard approached and ordered the prisoners to rise up and go into the barracks. Then, with their muskets presented, they ordered them to go into the *Black-hole Prison*; while others with clubs and scymitars, pressed upon them so strongly, that there was no resisting it; but like one agitated wave impelling another, they were obliged to give way and enter, the rest following like a torrent. It was about eight o'clock in the evening when these 146 unhappy englishmen, exhausted by continual action and fatigue, were thus crammed together into a dungeon about eighteen feet square, in a close sultry night in Bengal; shut up to the east and south, the only quarters from whence air could reach them, by high walls, and by a wall and door to the north, open only to the west by two windows, strongly barred with iron. They had been but a few minutes confined, before every one fell into a perspiration, so profuse, that no one can form an idea of it. This brought on a raging thirst, which increased in proportion as the body was drained of its moisture. Various expedients were thought of to give more room and air. Every hat was put in motion; they several times sat down on their hams, but at each time several of the poor creatures fell, and were

" The fatal mandate, glad would I pronounce, 145
 " But there is one objection that, 'till now,
 " Struck not my mind. I cannot as I would!
 " I have an unimaginable dread
 " Of powers invisible! Regard my words.

" Ere to the Saxon shore I urged my course, 150
 " As well befitted Dane, first I resolved
 " To seek the Oracle. To the near waves
 " I hasted, and upon the foaming beach
 " Beheld a mariner; aloud I cried,
 " Launch out thy bark! and bear me to the spot 155

instantly suffocated or trod to death. Before nine o'clock every man's thirst grew intolerable, and respiration difficult. Efforts were again made to force the door; but still in vain. Water! water! became now the general cry. Some water was thrown in at the windows, but these supplies only served to raise and feed the flames. The confusion became general, and horrid from the cries and ravings for water, and many were trampled to death. This scene of misery proved entertainment to the brutal wretches without, who supplied them with water, that they might have the satisfaction of seeing them fight for it, as they phrased it; and held up lights to the bars, that they might lose no part of the inhuman diversion. Before eleven o'clock, most of the gentlemen were dead, and one third of the whole. Thirst grew more intolerable. By half past eleven, most of the living were in an outrageous delirium. They found that water heightened their uneasiness, and, air! air! was the general cry. Every insult and opprobrious name was used, to provoke the guards to fire upon them; and every man had eager hopes of meeting the first shot. Still others expired. About two in the morning, they crowded so violently to the windows, that many died standing, unable to fall by the throng and equal pressure round. When the day arrived, the stench arising from the dead bodies was insufferable. One of the guards, more humane or more avaricious than the rest, had been prevailed upon twice during the night, to go to the residence of the Nabob to inform him of the wretched state of the english prisoners; but he as often returned and said, that his Highness was asleep *and he dared not wake him*. The Nabob awoke about six, and being told of the state of the prisoners, he directed that they might be brought out of their prison, when the poor remains of 146 souls, being only *twenty-three*, came out alive, emaciated and in a high fever. The dead were soon after thrown into a ditch, and the Sultan concerned himself no more on the subject. Calcutta was retaken the year after by Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, when Surajal Dowla, the afore-mentioned Nabob, was put to death.

"Where dwells the Oracle.

"I cannot go," 140

"Slow he replied; "Behold the maddening surge!"—

"When strait I slew him. Having reach'd the Witch,

"She knew the deed, and chid me with such frowns,

"Call'd up such legions of infernal forms,

"And so o'erpower'd my sight, with unknown shapes,

"Terrific, that I vow'd, grasping my sword,

"When to this land I came, never to shed

"One drop of human blood, but what the wars

"Gave me in lawful Pris'ners. This I swore:

"And I so dread her frown, at the still hour 150

"Of midnight, when all darkness is around;

"That I the oath must keep! I have no choice!

"That vow hath saved her. GUTHRUM, take thy slave!"

Quick as the Panther leaps upon his prey,
GUTHRUM uprose and answer'd, "Chieftain, hail! 155

"IVAR, I bid thee, hail! and now behold

"In me a friend indeed!"

As look'd the Fiend—
Hell's Monarch, when the Savior to him cried,
Turning in his full might and majesty,

"Get thee behind me, Satan!"—HUBBA look'd, 160
Fierce in his wrath, and muttering half-form'd words
Of direful import.

GUTHRUM him approach'd,
And mildly said, "Good HUBBA! I am glad,—
"Wherefore should'st thou be sorrowful? Such wrath

" As thou indulgest ill befits a Prince, 165
 " And such determin'd vengeance. Thou hast shewn,
 " 'Till now, respect for women, and the hate
 " Thou bearest one, so gentle and so good,
 " Afflicts my spirit. I am old and grey,
 " But I remember once my heart like thine: 170
 " For as the withy throve where water was,
 " So I, 'mid strife; yet, tho' I know myself,
 " That hour is past. I now with cooler mind
 " Can judge our state, and for the common cause
 " Make something like concession.—These my words!

" When first about the fleet, our swords were drawn,
 " Where was the cause of anger? for thyself,
 " Or me? I fear'd not, thou the same; we both
 " Fear'd neither one the other: wherefore then
 " That passion and this agony of rage? 180
 " I am content to own HUBBA my friend,
 " If thus the same, HUBBA of GUTHRUM says.
 " This is no time for jarring! we must join—
 " Speak I not, IVAR! right, both hand and heart
 " To meet these Saxons, and that first of men, 185
 " For courage, constancy, and deep designs—
 " ALFRED their King."

IVAR exclaim'd, "Right well!
 " Brother, thy hand! Receive our father's friend!"
 HUBBA uprose, and with feign'd fellowship
 Clasp'd GUTHRUM, yet no word he spake: he look'd
 As tho' he brooded o'er revenge, not ripe,

Rankling within. When IVAR thus began:

“ To see you friends, once more, makes me rejoice.
“ When the full time is past of rights revered,
“ Forth will we march to seek where hides the King,
“ The exiled ALFRED. Harper, now bestow,
“ Some cheerful song, and let our lighten'd hearts
“ Dance to the laughing instrument.” The King
Slowly uprose, and thus—sang to his harp:

“ Danes, far renown'd o'er all the north, and known
“ To every wave of ocean—like the Pine,
“ Torn from the mountain's base, riding secure
“ Upon the foaming billow; hear my song!—
“ Friendship is dear to man, the hour of strife
“ Bitter as wormwood to the heart that feels 205
“ And prizes friendship. In the midnight hour,
“ 'Mid revels and the drunkard's orgies vile,
“ Anger is seen, and in his train, all ills;
“ But where the brave abide there is the soul
“ That feels another's injuries the most. 210
“ Love, Love, celestial! wheresoe'er thou art,
“ There is all good, all harmony; the heart
“ That truly loves, a mail'd defence doth wear
“ That blunts all sorrow. Let each soul be true,
“ Of all that round me listen, to the vows 215
“ Preferred in happier times, and patient look
“ For future recompence. The world around
“ Vainly assaults that mind which, to itself,

" Dares to be faithful. Where affection dwells,
 " Let all around me prize it! let them know 220
 " Its value,—nothing here hath magnitude
 " By which to tell its value! Pearls and crowns
 " Depart as shadows, but affection true,
 " Constant and spotless, scorning time and place,
 " Lives and forever lives, for 'tis the gift— 225
 " First and most precious of the gods to men. —
 " The Ocean that with raving mounts to Heaven,
 " And seems ordain'd through endless years to roll,
 " Forever troubled, soon shall stay his wrath.
 " Oh ye whose hearts Affection calls her own, 230
 " Heed not your sorrows! soon the storm shall cease
 " Like Ocean in his fury."

IVAR cried:

" Harper, thy minstrelsy makes my heart glad!
 " Where learned'st thou thy song? Didst ever tread,
 " On distant Denmark, for it seems the same 235
 " Which I in mournful mood to FREDA spake
 " Ere I came hither." HUBBA thus replied,
 " And I to THORIS." Wildly cried the King,

" I ride upon the winds, or, 'tween the waves
 " When the storm howls, recline myself and sleep
 " As all were quiet. Have you never heard
 " 'Mid forests deep the night-owl whoop to me?
 " And on your native mountains seen on high
 " The eagle sailing, whilst ye heard afar
 " My harp in solitude, and straight beheld, 240

"Check'd in his course, the eagle fall to earth,

"Owning my sway?"

"I think I have," replied

HUBBA, and slowly thus to IVAR spake.

"This fearful and most questionable thing,

"For whether man or not, I would not say, 245

"Cheats me of reason. IVAR! bid him haste

"From this our presence, for I fear me much,

"Nay I could swear by his long eye-lash black,

"'Tis LOKE himself, that evil Deity

"Whom gods and men abhor. He hath great power,

"So we must treat him kindly."

IVAR look'd

In dubious mood 'twixt doubt and certainty,

And thus replied. "I never should have thought

"That Harper LOKE! No! no! it cannot be!

"Thy brain is always working up itself 255

"With groundless fancies. He is what he seems,

"A wand'ring Harper, whom some sore mishap

"Hath lighted on, and his poor crazy brain

"Served as we witness." Turning, thus the Chief :

"Thy harp, good Harper, thou hast learn'd to touch,

"With most bewitching tenderness; thy voice,

"Form'd by thine instrument, hath to our minds

"Call'd up sweet images, so clear and sweet,

"That truly I could wish this warfare o'er,

"That I might back to Denmark and exchange 265

"The shadow for the substance: but, vain thoughts!

" This is no time for love's soft witcheries.
" Now we are friends, let us with speed prepare
" To meet the fight, for as the husbandman
" Tills ere he reaps and houses, so must we 270
" First sow the seed in war, ALFRED first meet.
" But yet before we part, one other song
" Methinks might cheer us. Woman, take the harp!
" And let us hear if thou hast learn'd to touch
" Soft notes like him thy countryman."

The Queen,

Blushing thus sang. " Faint is my voice and harsh,
" And feebly do I touch the minstrel chord,
" Yet will I sing thy praises, Chieftain, thine
" Who gav'st me life, and at this hour command'st
" My harp to speak. Sweet is the harshest song 280
" That springs from gratitude, and I will strike
" The harp, albeit discordant." Then she ceas'd
And to the Chieftain IVAR spake.

" My Lord,

" One song alone is mine; 'tis of a maid
" Who on the wide seas saw her lover go, 285
" And wand'ring on the beach, to every wind
" That waved her tresses, sang the song I sing.
" If thou would'st hear it, speak and I comply."
He cried, " Proceed!" When, trembling, she began.

" Beloved go! go o'er the briny sea, 290
" And spirits guard thee! When thou liest down,
" May sometimes my soft image hover round,

“ And may'st thou stretch thy hands, me to infold,
“ Tho' idle as the hopes that led thee hence.
“ Go youth, beloved! go to thy last long home! 295
“ For never more shall I behold thee! Go!
“ But soon the waves will swallow thee; the rocks
“ In ambush lie. Oh think of me, my love!
“ And if my life could screen thee from the storm,
“ Then were thy dangers o'er. Go, gentle youth!
“ Soul of my soul, and may the winds and waves
“ Pity my sorrows: may they guide thee back
“ To meet me, oh beloved! may they shew
“ Compassion for the tears I hourly shed
“ And waft thee hither—waft thee to my arms. 300
“ But if the destinies, beloved youth!
“ Should keep thee from my bosom, if the wars
“ Or stormy main should stop thee—still believe
“ That in my dreams by night, my thoughts by day,
“ Thou only dwellest—idol of my heart! 305
“ How cam'st thou where thou art? Behold thy state!
“ Fly back beloved! Dread thy mighty foes!
“ For death is near thee! Trust not thou to chance
“ Thy precious being! Instant, flee away!
“ But tho' thou long should'st lose me, thou shalt find,
“ If e'er thou see me more, my love the same,
“ My heart still pure; and if far off I die,
“ Pity the maid who with her latest breath
“ Call'd on her True-love, and from Heaven implored,
“ Blessings on him and his.”

She ceas'd the song. 315

IVAR uprose and said, "Now may we part."
When to the tent there came a Spy, return'd
From wanderings far. Him IVAR saw, and cried;
"Hast thou heard ought of ALFRED? or what force
"The Saxons have? where now they are? declare!"
The panting Dane replied,

"I know it all!

"I have seen ALFRED, and beheld the spot
"Where now he is, where all the Saxons dwell;
"I know their haunts, their numbers, their designs,
"All, all is mine!" With instantaneous voice 325
Each Chief replied, "Declare it! tell thy tale,—
"Each circumstance minute." When thus he spake,
Turning to ALFRED, with imperious voice,

"What doth this harping man do here? I late,
"From yonder hill, beheld him on our camp, 330
"Gazing with cautious eye." HUBBA exclaim'd,
"Hold thy peace, Dane! Thy tale!" He thus began:

"We left you, mighty Princes! to find out
"Where ODDUNE fled, and where the Saxon King—
"ALFRED, conceal'd himself. We thought it well,
"Singly to journey. Thus, of all our band,
"Each took a different road. Through the dark night
"I roam'd, and fear'd the smallest star, as tho'
"It had an eye that look'd alone for me.
"Woods were my habitation; I have lain, 340
"Upon the tall branch swinging, all the day,

“ ‘Mid the thick leaves, and, as the eve drew near,
“ Crept to the utmost verge to gaze around
“ For cottage, or the next o’er-shadowing wood
“ Myself to hide. Long were it now to say 345
“ My hourly perils, or how dull to stride
“ Some giant limb, and scarce a living thing,
“ Through the long hours behold save, overhead,
“ The Squirrel that regardless crack’d his nuts
“ And dropp’d them on me.
“ Thus the day I pass’d,
“ And in the night came down to search about
“ For cottage, or some solitary Hind,
“ Whom I might question. Long I sought in vain;
“ When, I o’ertook a man and bade him tell,
“ Where ALFRED was. He cried, I know not, Dane!
“ And if I did, think’st thou, that thou should’st know?
“ I answer’d not, but clave him to the ground.
“ Onward I march’d, and saw a cottager
“ Slow pacing homeward. Near his door he was;
“ And as he cast his eye, by the pale moon, 360
“ And glimps’d me, fast he sped; I follow’d hard,
“ When seeing him upraise his staff, my sword
“ Gave to the thirsty earth the Saxon’s blood.
“ Now far I roam’d through a vast wood, so vast,
“ That like the sea, illimitable round, 365
“ It seem’d to spread. When by a clear brook’s side,
“ I saw another cottage. At the door
“ I knock’d, none answer’d me, I knock’d again;
“ When, wistless who it was, an old man came,

" And ask'd my business. Close behind him stood
 " His aged wife: earnest they both look'd up,
 " And undismay'd, inquired again the cause
 " That brought me thither. Thus I answer'd them:
 " Vain to oppose me! instant say, old man!
 " Where ALFRED is!" This was his answer, " Friend
 " I know not." "Nay, but on thy life old man,
 " Say where thy Monarch! Fail not to declare,
 " Or death be thine!" When holding up my sword,
 " Stay!" he exclaim'd. " I am an aged man,⁴
 " And many a long year in this woody vale 380
 " Through summer and through winter, I have dwelt,"
 " But answer me! I cried. Where is thy King?"
 " Oh stay thy hand! for by the saints above
 " I cannot tell—I never harm have done—
 " Spare my grey hairs!"
 " Vain is it thus to talk, 385
 " I answer'd, and that instant drove my sword,
 " Deep in his breast, when loud the woman cried,
 " Spare him!" I answer'd not, but with my sword
 " Forever closed her eyes. Truly I felt
 " At the first view of killing them, a dread—

⁴ Several instances of great longevity appeared in England about this time. " When the famous Turketul, who had been chancellor of England, and one of the greatest warriors and statesmen of his time, retired from the world, and became abbot of Croyland, he found five very aged monks in that monastery, to whom he paid particular attention. Father Clarenbald, the oldest of these monks died A. D. 973, after he had completed the 168th year of his age. The second, who was named father Swarling, died the same year, at the age of 142. The third, who was called father Turgar, died the year after, in the 115th year of his age. The two other monks Brune and Ajo, died about the same time, whose ages were not exactly known, although they must have been very old, as they both remembered the old abbey of Croyland, which had been destroyed by the Danes in the year 870. These facts are related with much confidence by Ingulphus, who was abbot of Croyland, and wrote from the Historical Register of that abbey."

" A check within—a slow recoiling of the mind;

" But then the thought, that they were Saxons, rose,

" And pity I had none.

" Now on I march'd.

" Far through the wood I wander'd, and again,

" As was my custom, climb'd a lofty tree

" To meet the day: when, to my wond'ring eyes

" Appear'd a castle, 'mid the thickest wood,

" And near, the Saxon army—there they are!

" Upon the loftiest walls, whilst the morn lagg'd,

" I saw a man, so active 'bove his peers,

" And with command so regal, that I thought

" And yet do think, it was the Saxon King:

" I still look'd round, and, as the morn advanced,

" Beheld the castle clearer; when I fled,

" Seeking thee here. By my good Prince's grace

" True is my story."

" Bravely hast thou said."

Cried IVAR. " Now the certain day draws near—

" The hour of vengeance! ALFRED, thou art there!

" But, ere another moon, low in the dust

" Thy head shall lie. HUBBA, regard my words!

" And GUTHRUM, mark me! When the hour hath pass'd

" That bounds our revelry, and the full time

" Appointed to our gods—five days from this—

" Forth will we seek that forest, and consign

" To black perdition—ALFRED and his host."

All shouted, "Speed the time!" and forth withdrew.

ALFRED. BOOK XVII.

ARGUMENT.

ALFRED on his return to Selwood Forest meets Sigbert; sends him to the Cottage at Etbelney; joins his Troops; marches to fight the Danes; meets the enemy; Oddune dispatched to them with a summons; preparation for battle.

'TWAS midnight when the danish Chieftains rose
And left the tent. ALFRED his harp unstrung,
And moved in careless attitude, then stood,
Whilst through the darken'd air the big torch flamed,
To catch one glance of her—ALSWITHA, now 5
Led from the jarring tent. Vain was the hope;
He saw her by the Chieftain, GUTHRUM, slow
Conducted. On, she silent walk'd. Her eye
Dwelt on the ground. The King beheld her go,
Disconsolate, nor moved, 'till every ray, 10
That lit her footsteps, vanish'd.

Now he thought
Of perils that his own path throng'd. The wind
Howl'd through the air, and every blast that blew

Seem'd on his heart to strike, and bleaker make
 The dreary scene around him. To escape, 15
 He now resolved, and hastening through the camp
 Drew near a centinel.

“What step is that!”

The warrior cried, and rais'd his lance. The King
 Heeded him not, but, looking to the clouds, 20
 Moved on and mutter'd: “Slow! slow! slow! moveslow!
 “Now mount, and through the midnight air advance!
 “Ah wherefore lags yon star? what not to night
 “Look you and smile?”

The centinel exclaim'd,

“By my good spear, the Harper! Wherefore, man!
 “Cam'st thou this way, whilst the wind roars so loud,
 “That every living thing, at such an hour,
 “Shelter methinks might seek?” ALFRED replied;
 “Pass'd he this way, the horse, for on his back
 “I now must bathe in th' ocean, and prepare 30
 “To-morrow's banquet.” “Bathe at such a time!”
 Answer'd the Dane. “The ocean thou may'st hear,
 “But canst not see. I troth so dark a night,
 “Man scarce hath walk'd in.”

“Dark!” replied the King,

“Call you it dark, when o'er the pebbly ground 40
 “The glow-worm journeys, and the ruby shines? Ah! ah!
 “Fine things are yonder! spy you the sad sight?
 “Treason! Behold the sea and land consent
 “Stations to change! what will become of thee?
 “I in the ocean dwell! I dread it not! 45

"I feed the Porpoise! Hark, her young ones cry!
"I must away!" Then slowly he pass'd by,
And, as he pass'd, the Dane, smiting his breast,
Cried, "Frantic man, safe be thy wand'rings wild!"

When ALFRED through the hostile camp had gone,
He leap'd with joy; yet felt a secret chill
Creep through him, for the stormy night was dark,
And where to bend his course, doubtful he stood.
Long thus he paus'd. The dew was thick and cold,
And all his perils, 'till this dreary hour, 55
Seem'd hid from his perception, and they came,
Now, like a flood, across his feverish mind,
Whilst musing thus, slow from her watery bed,
With timid ray, the horned moon uprose,
And from her calming influence, seem'd to say 60
To all the elements, "Like me be still."
The King her pale beams joyfully beheld,
And sped toward Selwood; doubting every sound,
The foe pursuing, and each branchless tree
Some lurking Dane.

After long toils and cares, 65
Consuming, to the forest verge he came;
And, gazing at his dress, thought of the spot
Where other garb awaited, and with joy
Sped on. Nor travell'd ALFRED far, before
He saw the cot, beside the same clear brook 70
Which late he left. The trees around him seem'd

More green, and with their best solicitude
To wave in sounds of kindness—harmony,
Sweet to the pensive mind—cheering the King.

Now to the door he came, prepared to meet 75
The cheerful woodman and his aged wife.—
What cold and creeping dew-damps o'er his skin
Burst from each pore, when on the ground he saw
The woodman murder'd, and his aged wife
Slain by his side! Then thought he of the spy 80
In IVAR's camp, and knew the murderer!
Pressing his heart, he cried, "Dane! thou hast slain
"A time-worn and most unoffending pair—
"God pardon thee!" Awhile he paus'd; then sought
The garments, round th' inhospitable hearth 85
That shew'd no master near. Cold were the stones,
The ashes scatter'd, and the half-burnt boughs
Resting, and still to rest in quietness,
Tipp'd with their heads of grey. Nor long he sought;
Against the cieling where the dry herbs hung, 90
Secure he saw them. Looking once again
Upon their forms, "Peace to your injured souls"
The King exclaim'd! He would have utter'd more,
But sorrow best loves silence. With a sigh,
That seem'd to rend his heart, he pass'd the door 95
To seek his subjects.

Morning now approach'd.
The hour was still; when, casting on his eye,
Far through the trees, he saw that wretched man—

SIGBERT, with solemn step, the woods among
Wandering alone. SIGBERT beheld the King, 100
And rush'd to meet him; fill'd with joy he cried,
" My long-lost Prince! my master! have I found,
" Thee, ALFRED! oh my King? Thy fearful frown
" At any other moment I might shun,
" Yet now I heed it not, to see again 105
" My long-lost Lord."

ALFRED remember'd well
His former anger, but, the sudden joy,
From certainty that he was yet a King,
So fill'd his mind, that he forgot the past,
And, wistless what he said, cried, " Peace be thine!"
SIGBERT then spake: " My Master, pardon me!
" And with my weakness bear, a little space,
" That I may tell my grief. To name the pain
" This breast hath felt, since thou didst bid me go
" An outcast and a murderer; I would fain, 115
" But cannot. Oh my King, this heart is sad!
" I with a guilty conscience have endured
" Sorrows unspeakable, and cares, so past
" The power of words, that how a heart should bear
" A load so vast, I knew not 'till this hour. 120
" Pardon me, Monarch!"

Thus the King replied:
" SIGBERT, remember, I am Man, not God!
" He must the deed forgive!"

When SIGBERT thus:
" Most truly! and, by wrestling fervently,

" His ear hath heard my prayer; and I have faith 125

" That guiltless in th' Almighty's eye I stand.—

" Do thou forgive me!"

ALFRED cried, " I do!

" I chid thee but to teach how harder far

" To bear Heaven's chiding. Now thy mind is whole,

" And thou dost see how mutable the man 130.

" Who on himself doth rest, when the hour comes

" Of sore temptation.—I am yet thy friend."

The drowning man who spies approaching aid,
Feels not such joy as SIGBERT. Thus he cried:

" Monarch, my heart is thine! but to my words 135

" Thou must not look for recompence. Declare,

" Oh King! how I may shew my gratitude,

" And if I do not shew it, trust not man!—

" His vow is vain."

ALFRED replied: " My time

" Important duties claim, but I will stay, 140

" Albeit unwise, one moment to bestow

" A passing word, with meek austerity.

" Ask of the world's great author, to subdue

" All evil in thy heart, but chiefly wrath—

" The source of ills unnumber'd, which, around, 145

" Spreads direful burdens—making hell of earth,

" And fiends of men. SIGBERT! 'tis well to know,

" This shadowy world, this transient state of being,

" But ill deserves of man, the sacrifice

“ Wrath ever claims. What is there here on earth
“ To rouse our spirits? what below the sky
“ Worthy a creature’s wrath? Few are our days,
“ And all our little evils, sent to cleanse
“ Our wayward minds, and faculties, from dross,
“ Debasing, and unworthy that high name— 155
“ The sons of God. Precious to Heaven, is he
“ Who sees in mortal things, their real worth,
“ And looks beyond them! Here on earth we sow,
“ After, we reap the fruit. The race is here,
“ The prize hereafter. Here the ocean raves, 160
“ There is our haven. And that man shall find,
“ Who through this howling wilderness preserves
“ Spotless his mind, and in a tainted world
“ Holds converse with his Maker; sees how great
“ The worth of holiness, and truly knows 165
“ How to respect himself, and to preserve
“ God’s temple pure;—that man shall surely find
“ Life’s evils fleeting, and his mind prepared
“ For that fruition, full, unspeakable,
“ God hath reserved in Heaven.

“Be these thy thoughts,

“ Oh SIGBERT! and when wrath o’ertakes thee, wrongs,
“ Stop thee to hear their tale; gird up thy mind,
“ And, like a traveller whose home is Heaven,
“ Small things endure unruffled. Thou hast slain
“ A pleading man! I would forget the deed 175
“ For, in thy countenance, methinks I see,
“ Contrition; that—to God! and for thy kind

" And many services, I hold thee dear."

SIGBERT essay'd to speak.—ALFRED again:

" As once I told thee, now I tell the same — 180

" Thou shalt not war! Profession thou hast made

" Of holiness and of devoted heart

" To holy ways—flee then th' avenging sword!

" If wars must come—if human blood must flow—

" Let those who never bore the teacher's name 185

" Stand forth and combat! but the God we serve,

" In most peculiar way, his ministers

" Requires to dwell in peace."

SIGBERT replied:

" As the tall tree, catches the sun's last beam,

" When all beside is darkness, so may I, 190

" When death draws near, oh King, remember thee,

" And these thy words! My heart indeed is fill'd

" With lasting gratitude. Thy mild rebuke,

" On this my mind, flashes conviction's light,

" And for thy precepts, I am nearer Heaven. 195

" I see my frailty, I perceive how wrath,

" And most full hatred, to the instruments,

" Heedless of guiding Heaven, hath fill'd my mind.

" Th' Almighty Father asks but penitence

" From us his children, and for these my crimes, 200

" That would I feel—I am an alter'd man.

" Point but the path thy servant should pursue,

" And he will seek it from this hour, and strive

" To merit thine applause—to copy thee."

ALFRED thus replied, "This, SIGBERT! would I say;
" Fly thou to Ethelney—that humble cot
" Where late thou saw'st me; there abides my son
" Whom thou discover'd'st on the bleak down wide,
" And thither broughtest. There direct thy course,
" And guard him with such constancy of care 210
" As I would gladly shew.

" Now are my steps
" Verging toward that decisive hour, when sword
" Must clash with sword, and every Saxon strive
" For life and liberty and each delight
" Man values. Doubtful the event! Thy King 215
" May not survive it! I have one request—
" SIGBERT, preserve my child! If I should fall,
" Keep him secure! and if in after times,
" Saxons should think of me, and Heaven have crown'd
" Their brave endeavours; lead him to their camp!
" Say to th' assembled army, View the child
" Whose sire was ALFRED! own him as your Prince!
" A better fortune shall support his arms,
" And he shall do what ALFRED would have done!"

Cried SIGBERT, "Oh my King! thou must not die.
" I had almost with impious zeal declared
" Thou shalt not die! Thou art our earthly trust!—
" Might I unblamed disturb the sanctity
" Of thy repose, and ask one question more?—
" Where is our blessed Queen?" At SIGBERT's words,
ALFRED his forehead clasp'd, a sudden chill

Rush'd through his frame, when, feebly he replied,

"Name it no more! I must not answer thee!

"Angels of God, defend her! me preserve,

"Father Almighty!

"SIGBERT! I am now 235

"Bound to the castle, and these moments few

"Ill can I spare. Depart thou on thy way!"

When SIGBERT cried, "Farewell!" and both retired.

As through the intertwined and darken'd path

ALFRED proceeded, from a thicket near 240

He spied a Wolf! His eyes were visible

While yet his form was hid;—glaring with wrath!

And as the King uprais'd his sword, the beast

Disclosed his fang, and with a horrid snarl

Darted to meet his prey. The Monarch stood 245

Unmoved! The wolf beheld, and fear'd to leap!

Foam issued from his jaw! a stream of light

From either orb appear'd, and every hair,

Bristling, declared his fury. Brief the pause!

He springs voracious. ALFRED stretch'd his arm,

And, with a sudden aim, seized his huge throat,

And whilst the monster coil'd, gasping for breath,

Quick, through his heart, plunged his resistless sword.

Now to the castle walls the King drew near.

The Saxons view, and rush to meet their Prince; 255

Wild with excess of joy! When ALFRED thus:

“ Friends at this hour, my heart intenser love
“ Feels for you all than it hath ever felt!
“ You are my children, I your father am!
“ Awhile must I withdraw.” The King, his Chiefs,
Call’d, and they follow’d him. ALFRED began.

“ ODDUNE, and ye my steadfast friends, I read
“ In every countenance, the unfeign’d joy
“ My presence gives you—take my grateful thanks!
“ Important are the scenes by me beheld, 265
“ Since last we met. I, ’mid the danish camp,
“ Have wander’d far! A harp upon my back
“ I bore, and journey’d unmolested, saw,
“ Their force, and heard their plans, and now am here
“ To tell you my designs. The hour is come! 270
“ Prepare for battle! In the danish camp
“ I stood and heard a spy inform his chief,
“ He knew our haunts! He knew the very spot,
“ Selwood he named, where all our forces lay,
“ With me, your Monarch. In their savage rights *rites*
“ Five days they vow’d to spend. If we advance
“ Fast to the combat, these our swords may bear
“ Destruction unawares, and from our might
“ Each Dane lie low. No season this for words!
“ Upon the coming morn, Saxons must march, 280
“ And now the preparation!” Each retired,
Rejoicing that th’ important hour drew nigh.

Ere the first blush of dawn, the King arose.

Wondering he saw, thus early, his brave troops
Marshall'd in due array. "At such a time 285
"I would not be the latest," he exclaim'd;—
"Great is your zeal." He further strove to speak,
But 'mid the shouts, no more his voice was heard,
Than is the pine's upon the mountain top,
When with the blast it swings, to some remote 290
And gazing traveller. The tumult ceas'd,
When the King cried:

"Brave subjects, now advance!
"The strife is near! We haste to meet the foe!"
Their swords they drew, ne'er to be sheath'd again,
'Till one was sunk in death, Saxon or Dane! 295

After long toil, with looks of secret joy,
Or, bitter as the hypocrite's in sleep,
As hopes or doubts prevail'd; they mount a hill,
When every Saxon stopp'd, sudden, like one
Who meets a precipice, for through the vale, 300
Before them, march'd the Danes! And they too stopp'd,
Half terrified at this unlook'd-for sight,
Saxons in arms.

Instant the Danes drew back,
(To a near hill, where a proud castle rose)
As tho' they fear'd the fight. The subterfuge 305
ALFRED beheld, and check'd his troops, who sought
Boldly to follow.

Soon they reach'd the hill—
The Danes, and both th' opposing armies stood

Wafting the mutual curse. Like two huge mounts,
Neighbouring, around whose heads, the white mists sail,
And ever when th' aerial currents change,
From each to each, moved by fierce jealousy,
Their cloud artillery send. ALFRED thus spake.

"Subjects, behold the Danes! view yonder host,
"And in them see the spoilers of your homes, 315
"The murd'ers of your children and your sires,
"The foes of earth, the reprobate of God—
"Now are your hearts your own?" All clash'd their shields.

"I will not bid my subjects bleed," he cried,
"But of necessity. ODDUNE, approach!" 320
The Chief drew near. Him ALFRED thus address'd:
"To me it seems expedient to dismiss
"Some messenger, of bold and manly port,
"To yonder Danes, bidding them leave this land."
ODDUNE replied, "Let me that herald be!" 325
"Go," said the King, "thus to the Danes declare:

"Ye wasting men! ye murd'ers, flee away!
"Swift as the eagle flee, or by the sword
"Soon shall ye fall, all fall, to teach mankind
"Heaven's recompence. Say, wherefore come you here,
"To scourge this land, to waste this happy isle,
"To wrong this people? whom your swords may slay
"But ne'er shall conquer, while yon sun remains,
"Or earth endures. ALFRED our King hath sent
"Me to forewarn you. Instant on the ground 325

" Cast ye your arms, and swear by all the gods
 " You worship,¹ forth to leave this land, nor more
 " Drench it with blood : so shall our King provide
 " Fit vessels, you to carry to your homes
 " Or where you ask it. Tell them I am one, 330
 " Who loves not strife, who never smote a foe
 " But with regret, pungent and keen, and now
 " Seek their departure, rather than their lives:
 " But if they scorn thee, tell them by the hand
 " That wields the thunder, by the power that stills
 " The Ocean when it raveth, I will meet
 " Their forces in yon spacious plain, and prove
 " What Saxons can perform, when in their might
 " They strive for liberty."

ODDUNE replied,

" Great is my gratitude for this new proof 340
 " Of confidence; and may I catch thy fire
 " And Danes impress, as thou impressest me.
 " Now 'till the hour of midnight fare thee well!"

Down the steep hill he strode, and through the vale,
 And soon, the foe approach'd. A band drew near 345
 And cried, " Thy business, stranger!" ODDUNE spake,
 " Where is your Chief? Lead me to him! I bring
 " Words of importance."

To the tent they then

¹ The Danes having several times violated the christian oath, Alfred compelled them to swear by their own gods, supposing that such an oath would be more likely to bind them; the success was however the same.

Conducted ODDUNE, where in bitter talk
 And loud upbraidings, all the danish chiefs 350
 Sat in close commune.

“ Ah! a Saxon here!”

Cried IVAR as he enter'd. “ Dost thou bring
 “ Vows of thy Monarch's fealty, or some bribe
 “ To stay our wrath?” “ Neither!” the Chief replied.
 “ Neither!” said IVAR. “ By thy stately port 355
 “ Thou seem'st like one, who never yet hath felt
 “ The danish sword, how heavy, when it falls,
 “ By danish arm impell'd. Thy business? Say!
 “ I wait to hear thee! If thou stop to gaze
 “ A second time around thee, this good lance 360
 “ Shall pierce thy heart.”

ODDUNE untterrified

Thus answer'd, “ Chieftain! if thou seek by frowns
 “ To check my purpose, resolute, oh Dane,
 “ Thou know'st me not! mine is no coward's heart!
 “ I bear a message from our gallant King,— 365
 “ ALFRED, his words are these.”

HUBBA upraised

His ponderous lance, and had not GUTHRUM seized
 And stay'd his purpose, prostrate on the ground
 ODDUNE had lain. Him IVAR thus rebuked:
 “ Thine anger check, good HUBBA! let us hear 370
 “ This Saxon's words, and, tho' we after slay,
 “ First know the message.”

HUBBA thus replied:

“ Now will I hear thee, cool; Saxon, proceed!”

ODDUNE prepared to speak, when IVAR cried,
 " Gaze not thus haughty! If thy message, man! 375
 " Be bold, as these thy looks, death shall hide both!"

" Talk to the Hind of fear, I know it not!"
 ODDUNE replied. " These are the words I bear:—
 " Ye wasting men! ye murd'ers, flee away!
 " Swift as the eagle flee, or, by our sword, 380
 " Soon shall you fall, all fall, to teach mankind,
 " Heaven's recompence."

GUTHRUM uprose and cried,
 " Let me this hero answer! By thy words
 " And looks so terrible, a stranger's heart
 " Might think thee some unconquer'd warrior bold,
 " From colder climes, but we the Saxon might
 " Too well can estimate, vain man! to fear
 " Thee or thy Monarch. ALFRED bids us flee!
 " Sweet words to lull old-aged credulity!
 " Or, by the sword, soon shall we fall! all fall! 390
 " This is so wonderful, that, to my mind,
 " It is as tho' some running Brook, with words,
 " Blustering and loud, should threaten with his waves
 " To inundate old Ocean. What the next
 " Said thy good King?"

ODDUNE thus answer'd him;
 " He bade me say, wherefore approach you here
 " To scourge this land—to waste this happy isle—
 " To wrong this people? whom your swords may slay
 " But ne'er shall conquer, whilst yon sun remains,

" Or earth endures. ALFRED our King hath sent
" Me to forewarn you. Instant on the ground
" Cast you your arms, and swear by all the gods
" You worship, forth to leave this land, nor more
" Drench it with blood, so shall our King provide
" Fit vessels you to carry to your homes,
" Or where you ask it."

GUTHRUM cried, " Most kind!
" But shall the ships be strong and large? My words
" Scarce can be serious! Did thy Monarch think
" Danes, like the Assi,² tremble at the beams
" Spiders in sun-shine hurl? Lay down our arms!
" What said he more?"

ODDUNE indignant cried,
" This, said our Monarch. Tell them I am one
" Who loves not strife, who never smote a foe
" But with regret, pungent and keen, and now
" Seek their departure rather than their lives."

Said GUTHRUM, " Kind! He pleadeth well the cause
" Of one who fears the future!" IVAR rose
And thus to ODDUNE spake.

" Presumptuous man!
" IVAR disdains to jeer thee! I will now
" Talk to thee serious. Has thy King e'er heard
" The laws we honor, and the gods we serve;
" That he should thus upbraid the true-born Dane

² The people of the south, who were believed to be all cowards, and for whom the Danes entertained the profoundest contempt.

" With loving blood too fondly? Dost thou know
 " What ODIN to the faithful warrior speaks
 " In dreams and darkness—in the stormy hour 425
 " When the winds roar, and ocean lifts his head,
 " Staying the winds that lash him? " Take thy sword,
 " Go forth and war! fear but the coward's name,
 " And tho' in many a prostrate victim's heart
 " Thy sword be bathed, go on to devastate ! 430
 " Scorn mercy! hear the pleader's voice in vain!
 " And ever when thy heart shrinks on itself
 " And pity whispers—think thou of the joys
 " Valhalla boasts, where never mortal came
 " Who waded not through blood, who never met 435
 " The foe in battle and inured his soul
 " To deathful enterprize?" What halls hast thou?
 " What object so commanding? motive, what,
 " To spur thee on to action? or delights
 " Compared to those we hope for, when, 'mid gods
 " We join the valiant, and from hostile skulls,
 " With songs and dancings, quaff th' immortal mead?
 " These are our hopes, oh Saxon! these the views
 " That urge us on to glory. Now declare
 " What more thy Monarch said! for I would hear 445
 " Albeit it make me smile and frown, like one,
 " Who sees some skiff, toiling amid the waves."

ODDUNE replied, "These were my Monarch's words:

" If they disdain thee, tell them, by the hand
 " That wields the thunder, by the power that stills

" The Ocean when he raveth, I will meet
 " Their forces in yon spacious plain, and prove
 " What Saxons can perform, when in their might
 " They strive for liberty. The God we serve
 " He is Omnipotent." IVAR exclaim'd; 455
 " Destruction seize thee, man! who stills the sea?
 " Who wields the thunder? who, but him we serve?—
 " The god of battle! Is he not our friend?
 " Hath he not follow'd us from land to land,
 " From sea to sea, rousing to strifes and wars; 460
 " And granting, e'en in death, to every Dane
 " The eye that speaks of ecstasy, the heart
 " That leaps with rapture?"

When with fiercer wrath

HUBBA uprose. " Tell thy devoted King—
 " Of every Saxon, not a man shall live, 465
 " By the next eve, to gaze upon the sun
 " And think how sweet his beams, when the rough air
 " Blows chill."

GUTHRUM replied: " Forgive these words!
 " Say not, they all shall perish, but, each man
 " Who owns not us the conquerors of this isle 470
 " And swears allegiance." IVAR cried, " Away!
 " Thy senseless words, GUTHRUM! confuse mine ear!
 " Speak not, but to inform yon daring man
 " He soon shall perish, like that gallant youth,
 " TULBA my brother,³ who from death sends forth

³ See Note 6, Book IV.

"Th' accusing groan, whilst loud our father calls
 "For sweeping vengeance. Tho' thy King approach'd,
 "And all his army, bending to the earth
 "With vows and oaths to call us their liege lords,
 "Yet would I scorn them, for, by heavens! I swear,
 "They all shall perish!"

HUBBA cried: "All! all!
 "Spare not one soul!" To ODDUNE thus he spake:
 "For this imperious summons, and thy threats,
 "Proud Saxon! thou art doom'd to share the choice,
 "Valkyries shall teach thee! Thou shalt live to mourn
 "But not survive our anger. Thou art now
 "Dead! for I view thee on the green sward stretch'd!
 "Prophetic visions dance before mine eye! I see
 "Thy faithless arm, beside thee! round are strew'd
 "Saxons unnumber'd, who like thee provoked 485
 "Our wrath and suffer'd. Instant flee away!
 "With second breath pollute not thou the air!
 "Or, know the consequence!"

He rais'd his spear
 When ODDUNE cried, "Forbear! If die I must
 "Let me this hour enjoy. Hear me, oh Danes! 490
 "One word, and I depart.

"This isle is ours
 "By long inheritance! We never roam
 "From shore to shore, from distant clime to clime
 "To rob our fellows—have we warr'd with you?
 "Have we alarm'd your coasts? disturbed your homes?
 "Destroy'd your people? never, as ye know!

" Scourgers of this our isle, I bid you heed!
" Our voice is peace, but if you stand for war—
" Unshaken, greedy of all violence—
" Saxons shall meet you! Vengeance shall arise, 505
" Dress'd in new terrors! seize her flaming brand,
" And join the fury of this fight, with eyes
" More fearful bright, than man hath yet beheld,
" Or Frenzy started at, gazing at Heaven.
" Prepare for combat! On the coming morn, 510
" Our swords shall meet you! God, the living God!
" Saxons confide in! Now I leave your tent."

IVAR exclaim'd, " Not so! First hear a Dane ;
" What is thy God to ours, that thou should'st boast
" Thus of his might? as tho' the immortal God— 515
" ODIN, the world's great father form'd not him,
" And thee, and us. Didst thou, bold man ! inquire
" The danish injury? the powerful cause
" That urged us hither—bade us cross the seas?
" Ask gasping REGNER ! ask our murder'd sire! 520
" Ask the deep curses, and the fiery wrath
" He breath'd at death, when to his country's gods
" He look'd and cried, " To join your laughing halls,
" Come I, blest spirits! Yet on Saxon land,⁴
" Let plagues alight!" Now of thine own heart ask
" What REGNER's sons might merit, if they fail'd
" To waste this isle, and with their valiant arms

⁴ See Note 4, Book XII.

" Send to deep hell, thee and thy hated race?—

" Dear is revenge!"

Like one o'er embers bent,
 Pond'ring on black designs, when, lo! the fire 530
 That seem'd extinguish'd, gives a sudden blaze,
 And shows the face, the wrinkled brow, the eye
 That pored on vengeance and all deadly plans,
 Conceal'd before,—So HUBBA's face appear'd
 With such possession of all hellish rage 535
 When IVAR named his father. Thus he cried:

" By all the Gods whose battles we have fought!
 " By all the hopes that cheer us! by the blood
 " Our father curs'd this isle with, when he groan'd
 " In Ella's dungeon—not one soul shall live 540
 " O'er the next day? Hundreds my sword will take
 " To stay its appetite! Its light shall gleam
 " New terrors on the dying! Hungry wolves
 " Shall hover round! The eagle from on high
 " Mark his near banquet, and with joyous scream 545
 " Stun death with horrors. To thy King at hand
 " These tidings bear! and let him for the fight
 " Hold his heart ready! for th' approaching morn,
 " When through the clouds the whizzing darts shall fly—
 " The bucklers thunder, and th' injured Danes 550
 " Shout 'mid the storm of vengeance! Now, depart!
 " Thy end is near!"

ODDUNE forbore to speak.

Self confident, he left the Danes, and walk'd

Slow through the hostile ranks, and down the hill
And through the vale, and to the lofty spot 555
Where ALFRED and his army pitch'd their tents.

The King beheld him coming, and advanced,
With mind presageful of no tidings good.

"What are thy words?" he said, "uncertainty
"Probes most my spirit."

ODDUNE cried, "Oh King!
"The Danes are hostile! On the approaching morn,
"Saxons must dare the fight!" ALFRED exclaim'd:
"Tho' seek I peace, yet fear I not to war!
"Prepare for battle!"

ODDUNE and each Chief,
Heard, and to rouse the Saxon hosts withdrew. 565

ALFRED. BOOK XVIII.

ARGUMENT.

*THE Saxons descend into the plain to meet the Danes. Dissensions in the Danish Camp.
The Battle of Eddington commences.*

O'ER all the Saxon camp, no man forgot
The business of the morrow. Through the night
Sleep never sooth'd them, and ideal forms
And images, all ghastly, wounds and strifes—
The sounding helmet and the clashing shield 5
So deeply fill'd their minds, that real things
Seem'd shadows, shadows real things. At length
The light of morn appear'd, and the sun rose
Slow on his journey, shrouded with thick clouds,
As tho' he knew the hour, and strove to stay 10
Th' impending deeds. When ALFRED spake his troops:

“ On yonder hill, behold that enemy
“ Whose wasting swords have left you now to boast
“ Nought but your courage ; that alone remains—

- " The fix'd, unperishable gift of Heaven! 115
 " Base is the heart that in a common cause
 " Raises this weapon! but, to save our lives,
 " To guard from ruin all that man holds dear,
 " Sanctions the deed! Who, 'mid this listening throng,
 " That mourns not, by yon wasters, home destroy'd,
 " Friends massacred, or wife or children slain?
 " Long have the loursing clouds our prospect hid,
 " And Heaven seem'd adverse; doubtless to correct
 " Some public vice, some confidence, in aught
 " Save Him who made us; but, the mists retire! 125
 " The dawn of hope is come! the sun is risen!
 " And we are now to combat. Yonder host
 " Have dared the Lord Almighty! Yonder host
 " Our God have dared defy, and now, His arm
 " Shall rise to vengeance. In the Lord of Hosts 130
 " We trust—our fathers' God; and in the hour
 " Fast coming he will be our friend. Arise!
 " Go forth to conquer! for this day shall Heaven
 " Fight on our sides.
 " Think, brave and gallant men!
 " What cause is yours. You, for your freedom, rights,
 " Your native homes, your faithful friends, the race
 " Who call you father, and the wife beloved,
 " Now fight! These rouse your spirits! these impel
 " Your swords to battle. What in life can man
 " Seek, after slav'ry? What can charm the heart 140
 " Of prostrate slave? Yet e'en this wretched state
 " You are denied, for yonder Danes have sworn,

“ Full confident of victory, to spare,
“ When this day’s strife is o’er, not one who lives,
“ Subject or Monarch.
“ Saxons! do I now 45
“ Declare of dangers you yourselves may feel
“ To fire your spirits? Well I know your hearts
“ Far nobler, than at time like this to pore
“ O’er selfish ills ; you cast your ardent eyes
“ To days far distant ! You with bitterness 50
“ Think of your future race, your sons unborn,
“ The generations, who, if we succeed
“ Against this raging foe, from us shall date
“ Their every blessing, and in after times,
“ When you are low and silent, look to Heaven, 55
“ And pray its fairest garlands ye may bind,
“ Its highest seats reward you. They shall sit,
“ Beneath the fig-tree and the clustering vine
“ Contented, and look back on you, brave men !
“ Who fought, perchance who bled, to buy for them
“ Each joy they know.
“ Start not at naming death,
“ For death will come, and many a man who now
“ Stands round me, soon must prove a breathless corse !
“ Myself may fall ! The tongue that speaks, this heart
“ That throbs for action, soon upon the ground, 65
“ Exposed, and still may lie. Sigh not at this,
“ But rather let our hearts—both yours and mine,
“ Exultant leap, and thank the God of Heaven
“ That in his sight deserving we appear

" To fight our country's battles and receive 70
 " The tear of gratitude from those to come.
 " Smile then at death! fear only to depart,
 " Unconscious of performing as you ought
 " Your trying duties. Having done, let pain,
 " Let anguish seize us—let soul-harrowing pangs 75
 " Rage their brief moment, but the conflict hard
 " Soon will subside, and then awaits us all
 " Pleasure on earth, or blessedness in heaven.
 " Now, down the hill advance to meet the foe!"

As the King ended, one wide murmur rose, 80
 Of admiration and heart-speaking praise.
 When to the vale beneath, dauntless they sped,

Still on the hill above the black flag waved;
 Nor Dane appear'd! "Now Saxons!" ALFRED cried;
 "The hour is come! The big, th' important hour! 85
 "Why lags the foe?"

Within the danish camp
 Loud tumults rose. IVAR's fierce eye beheld
 The Saxon army, and with wrath exclaim'd,
 "HUBBA, away! thy counsels I disdain!
 "Thou hast deceived me! Where was yonder host,
 "When in thy pride thou vaunted'st, and didst say
 "This isle our own—thy sword victorious
 "O'er ALFRED and all Saxons? Where were then
 "Yon marshall'd ranks, who now present themselves,
 "Clad in their war array, and shout aloud 95

" Frantic defiance? Where was ALFRED then?—
 " A wand'rer, as thou told'st me, in the woods
 " And caves and mountains; now, too late, perceived,
 " Hatching revenge, and brooding o'er the means
 " To stem our power! How hast thou spent thy time?
 " Where slept thy valour, whilst the Saxon King,
 " In secret plann'd for vengeance?"

Like the Bull
 Goaded to madness, yet with bars confin'd,
 HUBBA appear'd, 'till IVAR ceas'd; he then
 Cried vaunting :

08 " To thy native shores, again! 105
 " I heed thee not! I need not thy support!
 " Vain mortal, fly! and GUTHRUM, let him fly!
 " Fly all! myself shall meet the Saxons! this—
 " This arm shall meet them, and the Gods record
 " HUBBA'S proud conquest! I such force will shew
 " As when the ocean lays its monstrous hand
 " On some great continent—Or winter's King—
 " Dark Frost, upon the whirlwind when he rides
 " Triumphant, and with potent word, arrests,
 " When in 'mid course, plunging o'er hideous rocks,
 " The thund'ring cataract. What are my deeds,
 " Ask'st thou? oh IVAR! Let the Cambrian shore
 " Answer thy question! Let the wasted towns,
 " Britain beholds, her villages destroy'd,
 " Her cots consumed, her sons and daughters slain :
 " These are the deeds of HUBBA, ere thou cam'st
 " A tame spectator to look on, and now,

" Danger awaits thee, shrinkest at thy heart;—

" Unworthy of thy father and thy race."

IVAR indignant cried, " Spirit abhorr'd! 125

" Take back thy rage! reserve it to withstand

" The adder's venom, checking kind with kind.

" Oh shame upon thee! Have I not the right—

" The leader of the Danes, the elder far,

" To ask thy ways, and, if I deem it well, 130

" Check thee for evils, such as I perceive

" Thy inexperienced rashness hath brought down?

" I know I have! And if thou question it—

" This sword shall tell thine error!"

" Death be thine!"

Cried HUBBA; and, his sword upraising, aim'd 135

The fatal blow, that on the Chieftain's shield

Woke thunders, and as IVAR raised his sword,

That never fell but death attended it,

GUTHRUM his huge arm seized and cried, " Forbear!

" Chieftains, forbear! My head with mists doth swim!

" Is this your vaunted zeal? Danes, stay your wrath!

" Mark yonder Saxons! see their shining ranks!

" Hear their loud shouts! their mad defiance, hear!

" And from destruction save the danish host!"

IVAR and HUBBA paused. Both sheath'd their swords.

When IVAR thus exclaim'd to GUTHRUM near:

" Chieftain, depart! prepare the ranks, and swift

" If thou behold the Saxons from yon hill

"Descending to the plain, waiting the strife,
 "Approach and warn us!" GUTHRUM left the tent;
 When IVAR to his brother spake again.

"HUBBA, thy words have wrong'd me! thou hast wrong'd
 "Each honest Dane. Thy thoughtless confidence,
 "Hath sprung a trap so fatal, that to burst
 "Its fangs of iron, well might puzzle now 155
 "VAFTHRUDINIS' self.¹ For this I Britain left!
 "For this I sought my native land; and roused
 "Each Dane to follow me, breathing revenge!
 "Called up each dormant passion, made them feel
 "Unquenchable desires to spoil the race 160
 "That slew our father—now at length to see
 "The Saxon King, whom we so oft have driven
 "Before our might, unconquer'd, and about
 "With yon innumerable host, to strive
 "With danish valour. Not that I perceive 165
 "Fear at my heart; this breast must learn from thee
 "What fear mean, if it sought to know, for Gods
 "Fear not the Giants less than I the foe.²
 "With half our veteran army, I would march

¹ A danish giant, remarkable for his wisdom.

² A perpetual animosity subsisted between the Scandinavian gods and giants. The giants were supposed to ascend to the gods by means of the rainbow, which was called the bridge of the gods, to prevent which, at the foot of the rainbow was erected a fort, called "the celestial fort," and which was entrusted to the god Heimdall. "Heimdall is the centinel or watchman of the gods. The post assigned to him is to abide at the entry into heaven, to prevent the giants from forcing their way over the bridge. He sleeps less than a bird; and sees by night as well as by day, more than a hundred leagues about him. So acute is his ear, that he hears the grass growing in the earth, as well as the wool on the sheep's back."

“ Through earth, triumphant; yet, that thou may'st know;

“ In after times, what best may serve our cause,—

“ IVAR's experience hear!

“ Inferior ills

“ Leisure may combat, but to those alone—

“ The mightiest, every Chief, whom wisdom guides,

“ At first directs his efforts, and subdues 175

“ The cubless Bear—loud howling, ere he seeks

“ The timid Ermine. Since I left this isle,

“ Thou the sole leader, why didst thou forget,

“ Britain that Bear, and on the Cambrian Ermine

“ Waste thy best strength? Now see the consequence!

“ I knew not better than thyself, the force—

“ The living-spring resources of his mind—

“ The Saxon King; the valour he hath shewn,

“ The unconquerable firmness of his breast,

“ Who in his youthful days, our ablest Chiefs 185

“ Laugh'd at, and worsted—making even Danes

“ Behold their equal. Why didst thou pursue

“ So mean a foe, ere on our mother earth

“ Lay ALFRED? See him on yon hill! Again

“ I ask thee with imperious tone, how came 190

“ ODDUNE, that haughty foe, from Kenwith's walls

“ To baffle thee, surrounding, and escape

“ The danish wrath?”

HUBBA thus answer'd, “ Man!

“ I scorn to call thee brother! Thou art one—

“ A stranger, whom I hate with most deep hate! 195

“ Instant the battle ceases, we will meet,

" Death on our swords, destruction in our eyes!—
" One to the earth shall fall—HUBBA, or thou!
" When next thou sleepest, in thy dreams, beware,
" Lest thy brave father, breathing streams of fire, 200
" Draw near thy tent, and IVAR's dastard soul
" Hurl to the infernal worlds! Didst thou inquire,
" Proud mortal, why I ranged the Cambrian hills,
" Heedless of ALFRED? know, I thought it right!
" What would'st thou more! Upon the Saxon soil,
" No hostile army stood—no foe appear'd!
" 'Mid woods and hills they wander'd; whom our swords
" Spared but to fall on this more glorious day.
" And didst thou too inquire why ODDUNE fled?
" 'Twas whilst I to the gods the victim blood, 210
" Pour'd, as our fathers taught. The Saxons saw
" And fled at midnight.
" Now let HUBBA ask
" Of lordly IVAR. Why didst thou refuse
" To slay the Saxon Captive? Why didst thou,
" When HUBBA ask'd her blood, tell thy weak tale
" Of former terrors, and oppose the vow
" Gods heard me make? Soon shall her life appease
" My vengeance, and the instant yonder foes
" Have slept in death, tho' ODIN, from the clouds,
" With thund'ring voice implored my wrath to cease,
" Yet would I answer him, scornful, and swear,
" Upon the coming morn her blood shall flow!
" IVAR! thou blam'st my caution and would'st fain
" Make prudence thine alone: how was it proved,

" When, having reach'd this shore, thou left'st our fleet,
 " Unguarded, soon to blaze through Heaven's wide vault
 " Thy matchless folly? When the hour arrives
 " That to th' assembled worlds, shall tell, who best,
 " The warrior's part has acted, who has slain, 230
 " Most foes, and to th' applauding gods can shew
 " The greater host of skulls obtain'd in fight;
 " Then shall be seen whose sword, thine or mine own,
 " Best served the cause we fight for, and deserved
 " The noblest draughts of Heaven's immortal mead."
 He ceased. When IVAR, calm, thus answer'd him.

" Some crimes there are, and injuries so vast
 " And 'bove all recompence, that to repay—
 " In words, were with a straw to smite the man
 " Who aim'd to murder. I will answer thee, 240
 " Not, HUBBA! now,—not like thyself, with words,
 " But, like a danish hero.—One must die!
 " IVAR OR HUBBA! yet, will we subdue,
 " First, yonder Saxons, then the time for us.
 " Soon as the fight is o'er—the Saxons slain— 245
 " Their King laid low; then will we show our race
 " Whom most to honor!—By our fathers' gods,
 " Here do I swear, to end this day's offence
 " Alone with blood!
 Cried HUBBA, " Nobly said!
 " The same I swear! IVAR, thy life or mine!" 250
 As then he look'd to Heaven, pausing from wrath,
 And meditating some vindictive curse,

GUTHNUM return'd and cried, "The hour is come!

"The Saxon army marcheth! Fly we fast

"To meet the foe!"

The Chieftains grasp'd their swords,

Frantic for war; when HUBBA said, "Withhold!

"Ere the fight rages, let us seek our gods!"

He said, and on the ground, cast his broad shield,

And knelt. Him IVAR follow'd. Both look'd up,

When thus the Chief:

"ODIN, immortal sire! 260

"Father of slaughter! roaring deity!

"Who on thy wings of fire, bearest through earth

"Thick desolation; who from Valhall's halls

"Callest the slain to join thee;—vengeful god—

"Thou who alone canst rouse the heart afresh, 265

"When the shields clash, and uproar terrible

"Rages in battle—heed thy servants' prayer!—

"Give to the Danish sword yon Saxons' blood!

"Yon impious race, whose gods are not our gods,

"Whose altars shew no victims, whose delight 270

"Thou dost not share, nor FREYA, nor great THOR—

"Guider of thunders! therefore let them die!

"Inspire our hearts with wrath, our swords with might,

"That shall to quick perdition bear them all!"

He ceased, when both the brother Danes uprose, 275

And rushing like the war-horse to the fray,

Drew near their troops, that silent stood, whose hearts

Boil'd with black hate and wrath unquenchable;

And when they saw their leaders, demon yells

Sounded through all the air, and savage roars 280

Like of the lion's whelp. IVAR then cried,

Casting his eye upon the Raven flag

That waved beside him, "Lo! it flaps its wings!

"Subjects, rejoice! the Raven flaps his wings!"

"Triumph is ours!" Again the loud shout rang, 285

When IVAR thus:

"Behold in yonder host

"That enemy whom we so oft have fought,

"So oft have vanquish'd, and who now shall meet

"His final overthrow. Ye fearless host,

"Ye vet'rans whom my gallant father led 290

"Through all the North, driving each foe, like chaff

"Before the whirlwind, yet, to crown our toil,

"One task remains. There are the Saxons! there

"Your only foe, whom meet, and Britain yields!

"Weak are their bucklers! weak their puny arms;

"Their hearts are weak! Before our conquering sword

"Each Saxon's head must stoop, yet one request

"Make I, oh Danes! Their Monarch, leave to me,

"Touch not one hair of ALFRED! let this sword

"Contend with his, and by th' immortal gods— 300

"My might shall lay him low."

Now through the air,

He rais'd his monstrous arm, that like the limb

3 "The Danes had a notion, that there was a secret virtue in this standard, which Ivar and Hubba's sisters had wrought with their own hands, miraculously. They believed that, before a battle, the raven flapped his wings, in token of victory, or otherwise hung down his head as a presage of defeat."

Of some huge oak appear'd—the forest's pride,
Slow waving to the fury of the storm.
Again he spake, "One word and then the fight! 305

"When to the plain beneath I lead ye down
"It is enough to see that ye are Danes,
"To know the issue, yet, let victory
"Glut not your rage! nor stay the work of death
"Till all are slain! 'till in one common flood 310
"Each Saxon, with their King, has drench'd the ground.
"Behold the hostile ranks! they court the fight!
"Shall we be backward? Danes, behold your prey!"

Swift down the hill they rush, and in the plain
Meet the bold Saxon! See! the fight begins! 315
The battle rages! sword with sword hath met!
And hark the terrors of the sounding shield
That like two sheets of ice, meet, and through Heaven
Send their loud dissonance and horrid crash!

The hoary beard of some Norwegian crag, 320
High in the elements, that feels the blast
Shake its grey lock, which to the subject earth,
At length rolls headlong, spreading as it rolls,
One wide destruction, well displays the course
Of ALFRED'S sword, as through the danish ranks 325
It breaks its way—strewing the plain with death.

ALFRED. BOOK XIX.

ARGUMENT.

THE Danes defeated ; Oddune retreats to a near Castle ; death of Hubba ; burial of the slain ; Oddune sent to demand Gutbrum's surrender.

“SPARE! Spare the vanquish'd!” ALFRED cried. “O spare,
“ Subjects ! the flying foe.”

The routed Danes
Swift from the fight escaped—the Saxons close
Press'd after them, tracking the ground with blood:
And such an overthrow no eye had seen! 5
The scatter'd forces of the Danes fled fast—
Crushing each other, 'till the fort they gain'd,
Adjoining, through whose gates they rush'd, all pale,
And trembling, as the solitary blade
On the wide desert when the tempest raves. 10

Up to the gate came ODDUNE! in his hand
He held a lance all crimson, and when safe
He saw the Danes—the huge gates sudden closed;
Mists of uncertain forms before his eyes
Awhile seem'd floating, and, amid the gust 15
Of momentary rage, he thought the walls
Parts of some monstrous and unflying foe,
At which he hurl'd his lance. When, thus he cried,

Turning to his near forces, "Guard the gates!
 "Now must I seek the King."

Forth to the vale 20

He sped, and ALFRED soon approach'd, who yet,
 Perceived him not, intent on aiding those—
 The wounded, who o'er all the plain appear'd
 Silent in agony, or, with a groan

Of numbing import, gazing stern on death. 25

When, looking up, ALFRED beheld the Chief!

He spake not, each the hand of fellowship

Gave, but in silence; 'twas the moment full

Of holy feeling, when the spirit drinks

Deep of the soul of harmony, and spurns 30

The intermediate office of vain speech.

When after solemn pause, ALFRED thus cried:

"ODDUNE, the song of praise! Let the heart speak

"With voice articulate, for less than this

"Would make the very stones cry out "for shame!"

"The fight is o'er! The victory is ours!

"Behold the danish standard! see the flag

"Danes trusted in! but, by Almighty power

"Endued, with lion strength, this reeking hand

"Grasp'd the proud Raven, whilst the other clave 40

"IVAR in twain. Say what the fate of HUBBA!"

ODDUNE replied: "In the past fight, I saw

"A man, bulwark'd by slain, whose every blow

"Gave death a victim. Many a Saxon brave

"Lay low before him, when I knew the Chief— 45

"HUBBA, and rush'd to war. The strife was hard!

"He fell! This trusty sword beat him to earth!

"And as 'mid gore he writhed, I sought again

"The hotter battle."

ALFRED cried, "Brave man,

"This deed became thee! Point the spot where lay

"The hostile Chief! If yet he live, this heart,

"Forgetful of the past, will show what wrongs,

"Saxons can bear and pardon."

As they sought
The fallen warrior, ODDUNE cried, "Oh King,

"Say where the brother, IVAR, that fierce man 55

"Whose frown yet awes my soul." ALFRED replied,

"Soon shalt thou see the Chieftain, at this time,

"It is enough to tell thee he is dead,

"To say, I slew him. GUTHRUM, where is he?

"And where that other name, dear to my heart—

"Where is ALSWITHA?"

ODDUNE cried, "This sword
"Pursued the danish Chieftain up yon hill

"To the near fort, thou seest it! thither sped

"GUTHRUM, and a few foll'wers, breathless, wild

"Doubting if 'live or dead. I saw the gates, 65

"Before the Saxons reach'd, close on them. Round,

"Now are thy troops, and doubtless there abides—

"Our Queen ALSWITHA."

ALFRED said, "Heaven grant
Thy words no fable."

Now they reach the spot,
 Where HUBBA was. Thick as the autumnal leaf, 70
 'Neath some tall tree 'mid forest unexplored
 Where never wind approaches, round the Chief
 Lay death. And when he mark'd—ALFRED draw near,
 And Him who laid him low, he rais'd his frame,
 Then grown unwieldy, with hard labouring toil, 75
 And met their eyes undaunted. Thus the King:
 "Dane! we are friends. This day hath seen our wrath
 "Vanish! All help attend thee! Thou may'st learn,
 "Yet, ere thou die, the Saxon character—
 "In combat, pitiless, in vict'ry, mild. 80
 "Receive our aid!" When instant HUBBA look'd,
 Stern as when Winter darts his arrowy flakes
 On some lone trav'ller, casting his full eye
 Now at the King, at ODDUNE, now around
 On many a breathless corse; yet not a word 85
 Deign'd he to speak, he heaved no groan, he mark'd,
 Unmoved, the circling spoil; when, with a frown
 More terrible, he grasp'd a dagger, near,
 And plung'd it to his heart. Thus HUBBA died!

Awhile they stood and wonder'd, when the King,
 Cried, "Other scenes await us! ODDUNE, now,
 "Assist the wounded! be the hour improved
 "With all humanity, and let not one—
 "Not e'en a Dane, from Saxon hand receive
 "Requiting cruelty."

ODDUNE, the words, 95

Heard, and departed; whilst the King himself
 Fled through the fallen ranks — upheld the faint,
 Relieved the dying, succour'd those who bled,
 And to new deeds of kindness prompted each
 Of all around him.

One there was, a Dane, 100
 Who at his mangled limbs, lay laughing loud,
 And as the King approach'd, near to the spot,
 He saw the foe was aged, and prepared
 To cheer him. When the Dane exclaim'd:

“ Away!

“ I only ask thee, Warrior! with thy sword

“ To finish the good work; for here to die,

“ Seek I most earnest.¹ Give some Saxon, near,

¹ The love of a violent death, and an insensibility to danger, were remarkable features in the character of the Danes. “ Harold (a king of Denmark who reigned about the middle of the tenth century) had founded on the coasts of Pomerania, a city named Jomsburg; where he sent a colony of young Danes, and bestowed the government on a celebrated warrior named Palnatoka. This new Lycurgus had made of that city a second Sparta, and every thing was directed to this single end—to make complete warriors. Bartholinus, who has left us the history, assures us, that it was forbidden there so much as to mention the word fear, even in the most imminent danger. No citizen of Jomsburg was to yield to any number however great, but to fight intrepidly without flying. The sight of present and inevitable death, would have been no excuse with them for making the least complaint. Palnatoka seemed to have eradicated from their minds all traces of that feeling so natural and so universal, which makes men think of their destruction not without horror. Some of these inhabitants of Jomsburg, having made an irruption into the territories of a powerful Norwegian lord named Haquin, were overcome spite of the obstinacy of their resistance, and the most distinguished among them being made prisoners, were, according to the customs of those times, condemned to death. The first who was led to punishment was content to say, without changing countenance, and without expressing the least sign of fear, “ Why should not the same happen to me which did to my father? He died and so must I.” A warrior named Thorchill who was to cut off the head of the second, having asked him what he felt at the sight of death, he answered that, “ he remembered too well the laws of Jomsburg, to utter any words that denoted fear.” The third in reply to the same question, said, “ he rejoiced to die with

"Thine aid, I ask it not! I, for this hour,
 "That soon shall give me freedom and bestow
 "Immortal honors, have endured all ills, 110
 "All hardships, heedless; borne the battle's brunt
 "In many a clime; and often have I fear'd
 "This death was not appointed. I have err'd!
 "I feel the searching pangs, that tell me, soon
 "The strife will cease! I hear the God of Battle! 115
 "I see him there! he beckons me to come,
 "And in his hand he bears the frothy mead.
 "I come! I come!" When heaving his last breath,
 He laugh'd and died!

ALFRED beheld the sight,

And ruminated with a downcast brow: 120
 A sigh escaped, and in his heart he cried,

"glory, and that he preferred such a death to an infamous death like that of Thorchill." The fourth made an answer more extraordinary. "I suffer with a good heart, and the present hour is to me very agreeable, I only beg of you (addressing himself to Thorchill) to be very quick in cutting off my head; for it is a question often debated by us at Jomsburg, whether one retains any sense after being beheaded. I will therefore grasp this knife in my hand; if after my head is cut off, I strike it towards you, it will shew I have not lost all sense: if I let it drop, it will be a proof to the contrary. Make haste therefore and decide the dispute." Thorchill, adds the historian, cut off his head in a most expeditious manner, but the knife, as might be expected, dropped from his hand. The fifth shewed the same tranquillity, and died rallying and jeering his enemies. The sixth begged of Thorchill, that he might not be led to death like a sheep, "strike the blow in my face," said he, "I will sit still without shrinking; and take notice whether I once wink my eyes, or betray one sign of fear in my countenance. For we inhabitants of Jomsburg are used to exercise ourselves in trials of this sort, so as to meet the stroke of death without once moving." He kept his promise before all the spectators, and received the blow without the least sign of fear. "The seventh," says the historian, "was a very beautiful young man. His long fair hair, as fine as silk, floated in curls and ringlets on his shoulders. Thorchill asked him what he thought of death? "I receive it willingly, said he, since I have fulfilled the greatest duty of life, and have seen all those put to death whom I would not survive. I only beg of you one favour, said he, "do not let my hair be touched by a slave, or stained with my blood."

" Oh Lord, thy kingdom come!"

After long toil,
When each had known all succour and all care;
And Mercy, with the full meal satisfied,
Turn'd from the feast; ALFRED aloud exclaim'd, 125
" Saxons, approach!" Obedient they drew round
To hear their Monarch's words, list'ning so still,
As when some spacious grove slumber o'ertakes,
And every tree and leaf exalts itself,
And, looking to the Father of the skies, 130
Worships in silence. ALFRED thus began:

" Brave Saxons! with what joy I meet you all—
" What ecstacy, past language, now to say,
" The fight is o'er!—The day is won! This hour,
" Britain is saved! Where is the haughty Dane? 135
" Where are the men, whose impious tongues pronounced
" Our fates, and on the morn defied, that God
" Our fathers honor'd? Where are they who vow'd,
" This day should be our last? Behold them there!—
" Bathed in their gore. Where, Saxons! are the men
" Whom late you dreaded? whose victorious swords
" Ye fled from, 'till this moment—heard aghast,
" The scream you could not succour, and beheld,
" The flaming brand your dwellings light upon,
" And knew no choice, but, death or sudden flight?
" Where are the men, who with vindictive wrath
" Stalk'd through the land, and with their swords destroy'd
" What the flames left us—There! behold them there!

" Where are the men, who on their reeking spears
 " Toss'd our mild infants, and the aged slew— 145
 " The fathers and the mothers of us all?
 " Behold them there! Silent and stretch'd in death.

" This is a proud day for the Saxon name!
 " This is a fight that through succeeding years
 " Shall sound our praises, and from hosts unborn 150
 " Demand the song; and we will teach our sons,
 " While smiling on our knees, to lisp with pride
 " The name of EDINGTON!³

" Subjects, rejoice !

" This isle is ours! This green and fertile land
 " Now may we till! our homes made doubly dear, 155
 " Shall greet their masters, and one gen'ral joy
 " Spread all around.—" As when some vernal blast
 Sweeps o'er the forest, and with thundering roar,
 Sounds long and loud; whilst e'en the prostrate thorn,
 With its faint voice, swells the loud chorus higher;
 Such was the voice of Saxons, when they cried,
 " God and our King!" Through all the concave spread
 The loud acclaim, whilst here and there, with pangs
 Struggling, the wounded caught the gen'ral joy—
 The maddening ecstasy, and feebly cried, 165
 " God and our King!"

2 " Alfred, after assembling all his troops, with the greatest alacrity, presently charged the Danes at Edington (Somersetshire). Through the greatness of their numbers, they a long time sustained the utmost of the king's power, yet he at length prevailed against them, and that with so great a slaughter, as if that field alone had been appointed for the recompence of all the bloody and inhuman cruelties, they had before committed in the land."

After due course, again,
ALFRED address'd them. " Saxons! to me, sweet
" Your universal rapture, and the more,
" For that you think of God. He is our friend!
" His hand is manifest!—Rejoice with fear, 170
" And shout with trembling! lest in being thus,
" From bondage rescued, and most galling chains,
" Your hearts be harden'd, and ye look to Heaven,
" Not from th' adoring eye, but, from the pride
" That fills your souls—which ever will be found 175
" The presage of destruction.

" I would now
" Speak of our fallen brethren. Honor'd men,
" In dust laid low—receive our grateful praise!
" Tho' sunk in death, tho' from this glorious hour—
" This day of triumph taken; tho' denied 180
" That earthly recompence, which now, ere long,
" Your brethren we shall taste; ages unborn
" Shall shout your worth, and we will honor you,
" Injured and noble spirits! If there live,
" And that there does, we must not, cannot doubt,
" A God of Justice, who of human ways
" Takes cognizance, His piercing eye beholds
" The virtuous men, 'mid trials such as theirs,
" And doubtless hath prepared in Heaven above,
" Some jasper throne—some unimagined good, 190
" For those who in their country's cause may bleed."

When the King ended, not as heretofore,

Rose the loud plaudit, but a sober joy—
 A calm and peaceful grief, through all their hearts,
 Stole like the summer eve, when the sun fades, 195
 And quietly retireth, unperceived.

“ Now,” ALFRED cried, “ the rights of sepulture!
 “ Speed fast and form the grave. First for each friend—
 “ Each Saxon.”

Whilst the ready hosts obey'd,
 ALFRED, and that true friend, that valiant man, 200
 ODDUNE, through all the field of blood pass'd slow,
 Musing on human glory, and the end
 Of those who live for war—such were the Danes.
 “ Screen me,” cried ALFRED, “ oh thou Power on high!
 “ From the dark passions—fierce and deadly strifes,
 “ Which quench the heavenly spark, and to a fiend,
 “ Transform thy likeness imaged forth in man.
 “ Is life so small a thing, so little worth,
 “ That we should with it sport in idleness,
 “ And for some fancied, momentary good, 210
 “ Hazard our all? resign the precious gift—
 “ This state of being? scorn th' imperious voice
 “ Of duty here—the soothing promises
 “ Of joys hereafter, and unbidden rush
 “ Before Heaven's great tribunal? Such do those
 “ Who deal in blood, who on their peaceful beds
 “ Hatch murder, and war's dread vicissitudes.
 “ Not on the rude and giddy multitude
 “ Heap I these charges! Man's too ductile mind

" Receives impressions from the wiser few, 220

" Or good or bad, and like the horse to battle,

" Hears, and unthinking rushes on to death.

" Now, royalty shines on me! now I sway

" A nation's sceptre; now I view around

" Obedient thousands, and behold no foe 225

" To check the secret purpose of my mind—

" May I discharge the duties of a crown!

" Oh ODDUNE! let the man who coldly thinks,

" And feebly executes, check, with disdain,

" Godlike benevolence, and meanly creep, 230

" Through a long reign, that loud demands the race

" Of glory and true usefulness, yet I,

" Nursing big views of man's important ends,

" Will prize the thought, soul-moving, that on Kings

" Virtue and happiness, alike depend.— 235

" Not as the baseless visions of the night,

" Be these my thoughts, oh Searcher of all hearts!"

The King and ODDUNE now approach'd the spot,

Where, in the past fight, busiest, death had been;

And there lay IVAR! ALFRED saw the Chief, 240

And, tho' he breathless lay, approach'd him slow,

Half fearing lest his goary corse should rise

In madder fury than before, and dart—

Sudden destruction; for his hand yet grasp'd

The monstrous sword which at the King had struck

And pierced his helmet, with the brazen shield

Scorning to stay. When ALFRED spake the Chief:

“ Here lies our foe, once fear’d, but now no more!
 “ Hereshould our vengeance cease. This sight, I mourn;
 “ For never, ODDUNE! will a christian see 250
 “ A fellow man, consign’d to darkness, sunk,
 “ In error, and o’erpower’d with all the woes
 “ Hate genders—darkest child of hell! nor feel
 “ Pangs at his heart press heavy. Let us now
 “ Bestow funereal honors on these men— 255
 “ IVAR and HUBBA. Let us for the dead,
 “ Here on this memorable plain, erect
 “ The lofty Barrow,³ that posterity
 “ Often may visit where in quietness
 “ Lie the fierce Spoilers, Saxons once o’erpower’d.”
 He said and call’d attention. Thus he spake:

“ One task there yet remains! Take this huge corse,
 “ What once was IVAR! and that other Chief,
 “ HUBBA, who ’mid yon deathful heap abides,
 “ Tow’ring above his fellows: round them place 265
 “ Their thousands slain, and o’er them heap the earth,
 “ Lofty, that after years may mark this day.
 “ Yet, first regard your Monarch. Stands there one,
 “ Now round, who knows of Ethelney’s near isle?”
 When from the farthest throng, voices arose, 270

³ An old english chronicle, called, Brute of England, says, “ When Hungar (Ivar) and Hubba died, thei bare theym to a mountayn ther bysyde, and made upon theym a logge (Barrow) and lete call it Hubbalugh, and so itt is to this day in Debenshir.”

" We know it well," and straight two youths appear'd.
 The King survey'd them earnestly, then said,
 " Did you not stand beside me in the fight,
 " And do me service?" One, the elder, cried,
 " We did, oh King! When three fierce Danes press'd on,
 " And would have slain thee whilst thou stroved'st hard
 " With IVAR, we, between, rush'd and in dust
 " Laid them all low. Content with serving thee,
 " Th' event we had not named but to comply,
 " Sov'reign! with thy command."

ALFRED replied,

" Brave youths! tho' 'mid the fight engaged, mine eye
 " Glimps'd you beside me, and a certain sense,
 " Confused, of danger, struck my mind, unknown
 " Till this good moment. Take your Monarch's thanks!
 " Hereafter will I deal you due reward: 285
 " For never have I found true modesty
 " Not near allied to worth. But now, declare,
 " What know you of the isle of Ethelney?

" From thence we come," they answer'd, "'tis our home;
 " We are CEOLRIC's sons—an honest man, 290
 " Who there, with ACCA our good mother, dwells."

" Ah! is it so? cried ALFRED, " this indeed
 " Comes to my heart! and you will shortly know
 " My meaning. Haste to Ethelney and tell
 " ACCA, your mother, and your worthy sire— 295
 " CEOLRIC, forth to leave their cot, and bring,

“ With wonted care, a baby, to their charge
 “ Committed. Speed! and let that other man—
 “ SIGBERT, who there abides, guard him with you.”

The Rose in Paradise, that saw itself 300
 Invested first with thorns, if, as some say,
 Endued with consciousness, felt not such wonder,
 As struck these youths at ALFRED's words. They bow'd,
 And with conjectures, opposite and wild,
 Hasted to seek their homes.

“ Now,” ALFRED cried, 305
 “ View the unburied Danes, and heap the pile,—
 “ Commemorating.” At their Monarch's words,
 They turn'd, and o'er the slain upplied the earth,
 Stripping its surface, 'till at length there stood,
 A mountain by apparent magic rear'd.⁴ 310
 Whilst thus engaged, ALFRED to ODDUNE spake.

“ Tho' in my country's greater cause engaged,
 “ And silent of ALSWITHA, now my heart,
 “ Blameless, may think of her. Not yet indeed
 “ Complete the triumph, whilst in yonder fort 315
 “ GUTHRUM abides. Haste to him and demand
 “ Instant submission. Thou canst well direct

⁴ Tumuli, Barrows or Cairns, were often formed over those who had been slain in battle, by the surviving soldiers carrying their helmets full of earth, and continuing by these small means, 'till sometimes considerable hills were formed. Some who have not been aware of this practice have expressed surprise that artificial hills should be formed, on a plain, without exhibiting any excavations, from whence the earth could have been taken.

" Proper discourse; but if thou fail, require
 " That female Captive—whom, thou need'st not name.
 " ODDUNE add this to all thy services— 320
 " Not thrown away."

The Chieftain press'd his heart,
 And sped to bear the summons to the Dane.

END OF BOOK XIX.

ALFRED. BOOK XX.

ARGUMENT.

WHILE Gutbrum, in the Castle to which he had retired, is consulting with his troops, Oddune arrives; demands his submission to Alfred; is refused; claims Gutbrum's Captive; Alswitba receives her liberty; her interview with Alfred.

"DEATH! Death!" cried GUTHRUM, as he pass'd the gate
Of the near castle, with the wretched few
Who 'scaped the fight. "Death, death," the Chieftain cried,
" Why hast thou lagged so heavily? Why thus
" Spared me for anguish, such as never man 5
" Felt till this hour? Why 'mid our brethren slain
" Lay not this head? Now, hither am I come
" To taste the bitterness of death, yet lose
" Its cheering comforts. Curse these coward legs!
" They urged the flight! Give me yon axe, my hands
" Shall punish you, oh traitors!" Forth he grasp'd
A massy axe, and stood as he would strike—
When far he cast it. " Not for partial death,
" Seek I," he cried, " but death complete and full."

Turning to those around, wrathful he spake. 15

"Why are ye here? oh Danes! Ye heartless throng!

"Why fled you hither? Cowards, haste away!

"Yet, why was I a coward? Why did I,

"Shrink from destruction when I saw the day

"Lost and all o'er? Oh Danes, this bitter hour 20

"Probes deep our spirits. Since the fight is lost

"And our reward gone by, what now awaits

"To save us?"

One replied, "A deed may yet,

"If not prolong our lives, display our wrath,

"And rage remorseless. When the night draws near,

"Let us through this our gate rush out, with hearts

"Inflexible, our swords unsheath'd, and strive

"To slay the Saxon King, that only foe

"Danes ever fear'd: 'and tho' our death be sure

"Yet shall this act, Death of his sting disarm." 30

GUTHRUM exclaim'd: "Thou worthless counsellor!

"Fly, or a speedier death shall thee befall!

"As the last hour draws near, when we must quit

"This state of warfare, and from gods receive,

"Honors, proportion'd to our valour here; 35

"Would'st thou at such a time, degenerate Dane!

"Imbitter death, with this atrocious deed

"Of cold unmanly murder? If we fight,

"Let the broad day-light see us! let us meet

"The equal contest, clashing sword with sword, 40

"When the sun shines, and honest men can look,

" Nor feel resentment.—All beyond is shame!

" The midnight murd'rer, gods and men abhor!¹

" Base Dane, away!

" But to preserve ourselves

" That now befits us. Warriors! ye who thus 45

" Survive the fight, and, now surround, with looks

" All ghastly, from amazement, yet alive;

" Before I tell you what to me appears

" Best to assist us, I will first declare,

" Why we are here, and why the gods have cast 50

" Darkness before us; why we lost the day,

" And now are left, wretched and hopeless men,

" Buried in shame.—It was our Leaders' wrath!

" Peace to their memories! 'twas their rancorous strife!

" Which at the hour of battle, made them feel 55

" Hate, for each other, greater than the foe.—

" Low lie they both! and of the danish army,

" Great in their numbers! greater in their might!

" We only live! this little host, ordain'd

" To suffer for the follies we deplored 60

" Yet could not remedy. But, fruitless now

" To ponder on disasters, wiser far

" To think how best to act."

Debating then,

With counsels opposite, the hours pass'd by, 65

When one the spot approach'd and said, " Oh Chief,

¹ Many of the Danes held it dishonorable to surprise an enemy by night. See Note 6, Book VI.

" A Saxon asks to see thee! Shall we ope
" The massy gates, and give him entrance?" " Yes!"
Answer'd the Chief. " Conduct him here! our hearts
" Well can sustain his taunts." ODDUNE drew near,
And to the indignant GUTHRUM thus began:

" I come, oh Dane! from ALFRED our great King,
" Instant to claim submission. Spread your gates!
" Go forth, and on his mercy trust for life!
" So haply may you live." To which the Dane: 75

" Herald, we spurn thy words! Here are we safe,
" A little space, and never will we leave
" These walls to die by ALFRED in some hour
" Of scoffing merriment. Saxon, depart!—
" Talk not of mercy! I too long have lived, 80
" And known the human heart too well, to think
" Mercy can sojourn in a victor's breast
" Where wrongs like ours have roused his appetite.
" If the robb'd she-wolf met thee in her way,
" Would'st thou then trust her mercy, or, confide 85
" In thine own valour? Saxon, such will I!—
" Thy proffer we disdain! Vanquish'd we are,
" But not subdued. Here will we perish! Now,
" Fly swift and tell thy King our fix'd resolve."

ODDUNE replied, " Oh Dane in ALFRED trust! 90
" Nor of his heart, judge by thine own. He lives
" To show mankind, some lofty conduct, high,

" Beyond the common rule, and long will live
 " Posterity's bright model. Well I know,
 " Our Monarch boasts a heart, the which to trust, 95
 " E'en thou may'st venture." "Never!" cried the Dane.
 " Our oaths are pass'd, and like our gallant race,
 " Here will we stay!—defend this last retreat,
 " With courage of so bold and fierce a kind,
 " That even ALFRED's self, shall stand amazed, 100
 " And question his own sight. Now, Saxon, hear!

" It may not suit thy mode of thought, to learn
 " What Dane hath done; and thou may'st listen to me,
 " And at an old man smile. But I must speak!
 " I must my mind unburden! Thou must hear! 105

" For three-score years hath GUTHRUM urged the fight,
 " Through countries distant, with barbarians fierce,
 " With Frank and Saxon, and 'till this hard time
 " Never endured defeat! This trusty sword
 " Hath combated, 'till death itself denied, 110
 " The further victim. Never have I slept
 " Beneath th' inglorious roof,² or drank my mead,
 " In base seclusion! I have met the war
 " 'Mid clifts of ice, and mountains, white with frost,
 " Whilst we appear'd, 'mid the thick falling flakes 115
 " And arrowy sleet, columns of stalking snow.

² It was not uncommon for a Dane to boast, that he had never slept beneath an immovable roof, or drank mead by his own fire side.

" This heart hath dared all perils! I have oft
" Pillow'd my head upon the corse I slew
" And heedless slept amid the war of winds,
" Seeking most faithfully to serve my gods, 120
" And prove my valour. Yet, at length o'erpower'd!—
" Now doom'd to perish, not in honor's cause,
" Not in the well fought battle, but e'en here!—
" Here in this place, the mean unworthy death
" Of slaves and traitors! Yet, thy King inform, 125
" If die we must, brave will we die! This gate
" The last of living Danes shall guard, and raise,
" Even in death, his feeble arm to stay
" The Saxons' entrance. Now depart and tell
" All thou hast heard!"

ODDUNE replied, "Thy words,
" Truly will I convey. Dane! there is one
" Within the Saxon camp—an honest man!
" Whose wife thou late didst bear away, since which,
" Sorrow hath been his guest. Where is she now?
" And if within these walls, wilt thou release her?"

" I know to whom thou pointest, "GUTHRUM cried.
" A Captive whom I love, with such pure love,
" As the fond father feels—she is most dear!
" My daughter loved her too." The old man ceased.
He wept, then thus again: " But as thou say'st 140
" An honest man her husband, who, I trust,
" Knows how to prize her, she shall be releas'd.—
" Unknowing of this fatal day's defeat,

"In yonder tent she sits, silent as night!

"Take her, and forth depart!"

ODDUNE withdrew, 145

And now the tent had enter'd. Musing sad

He saw a woman, on the earth, her eye

Intensely pored, heedless of coming foot.

Her cheek was pale! When ODDUNE clasp'd his hands,

And cried, "My Queen!"

As one who in the dark

Sees, or believes he sees, some passing shape,

And, starting, looks aghast; so at these words

ALSWITHA rose, and with astonishment

Half wild exclaim'd, "What art thou?" ODDUNE said,

"I am indeed thy friend, and ALFRED's friend!— 155

"ODDUNE, well known."

Not more surprised the man,

Who at the world's remotest point, beholds

On some tall rock, in well-known characters,

His name distinct and clear, than felt the Queen

At these, the Chieftain's words. Doubting she cried,

"Is it some hellish phantom, to involve

"This heart in more inextricable grief?—

"Oh no! I know thee! Speak, or soon, my mind!

"Madness will seize!" "Forbear, my injured Queen!

"I now can only tell thee, thou art free! 165

"And I am thy conductor. Follow fast,

"Or danger yet may lurk!"

Up she arose,

A wild uncertainty hung o'er her brow;

When, leaning on the mailed Chieftain's arm,
She pass'd the gate. When thus the Queen exclaim'd:
"Is ALFRED safe?" "He is!" the warrior said;
"ALFRED is safe! and Britain now is free!"

"Free!" said ALSWITHA, "What, thou dreamest! Speak!"
ODDUNE replied, "Britain indeed is free!—
"Seest thou, oh Queen! yonder increasing pile? 175
"Beneath it lie the Danes! Thousands are there!
"And 'mid the multitude, this day o'erthrown,
"IVAR and HUBBA!"

"Tell me yet no more!"
ALSWITHA cried, "My brain is hot! Oh God,
"Spare my weak intellect!" Again she spake, 180
"Where now is ALFRED? gallant Chieftain, say!
"And GUTHRUM! where? Is he amid the slain?—
"High Heaven, I trust, hath spared that good old man!"
When ODDUNE: "He is spared! In that same fort,
"Whence thou art hast'ning, he abides, and vows 185
"To perish there, rather than to receive,
"Mercy from ALFRED."

"Hath he learn'd my name?"
Inquired the Queen. "If not, it may be well!"
"No!" answer'd ODDUNE. "Little knew the Dane,
"Who was his Captive. On th' opposing hill 190
"ALFRED awaits, with heart-devouring care,
"To learn my message, and if yet thou liv'st
"To crown his happiness." ALSWITHA cried,
"This is felicity! But, where my Child?"

ODDUNE distressful answer'd, "Of thy Child, 195

"Nothing I know, tho', doubtless he is safe."

"Oh no!" replied the Queen. "He is not safe—

"Save in a better world."

The sudden tear,

Suffused her eye! and silent they pass'd on.

When, calmly, thus she spake. "I would not mourn

"At Heaven's all-wise disposal; I have much

"That calls for gratitude;—Myself preserved;

"My better self in ALFRED; and the hope

"That quietness may bless his future reign.—

"I would forget my child!—Sweet babe, adieu!" 205

"But are not these deceptions? Am I safe?

"Is this no vain deceit of fairy land

"Where all is happiness but, shad'wy? Chief!

"Let me behold thee! Truly thou dost look

"Like faithful ODDUNE! art thou truly him?" 210

"Truly," replied the Chief!" and thou art now

"Queen of this lovely isle, and long I trust

"Ordain'd to grace its throne." "But say! she cried,

"How came these things—these changes wonderful?

"Which make my very being seem a dream, 215

"And all my past conceptions, words and deeds,

"Partaking of some unsubstantial form

"And link'd with very nothing." ODDUNE forth,

Declared of Ethelney, of Selwood's shade,

Of Kenwith, of th' avenging flames that burnt 220

The hostile fleet, and of the danish camp

Which ALFRED visited.

“ Oh name it not!”
Cried the pale Queen. “ I saw thy Monarch there!
“ The terror, the dismay, which through my frame,
“ Rush’d at that hour, fain would I blot from out 225
“ My burden’d mem’ry! As we journey on
“ Complete thy story!” ODDUNE told the Queen
Of the past fight.

Each circumstance she heard,
Looking like one, who through the charnel-house
At dead of night doth roam, for penance due, 230
Or, to relate to gaping auditors,
What shapes were seen, all white and terrible,
At the still hour, when fancy, unconfined,
Sees clearer for the darkness, and beholds,
Each soul-o’erwhelming spectacle, when ghosts 235
Have their night revels.

Through the vale they pass’d,
Thus communing; and now they near approach’d
The tent, where ALFRED was. ODDUNE then spake:
“ I would draw nigh the King, if seem thee fit,
“ And first address him, lest the sudden gust 240
“ Of rapture, half o’erpower his lab’ring mind.”
“ Depart!” replied the Queen. “ I at the door
“ Will wait thy signal.”

ODDUNE saw the tent,
And enter’d. At his sight the King uprose,
Then, starting back, exclaim’d; “ ODDUNE, no Queen!
“ I fear to ask thee! yet, thou may’st proceed!

"I think I can endure to hear the tale!"

ODDUNE began. "First will I name, oh King!

"Of GUTHRUM. He disdains thy words, and swears

"To perish in yon castle." ALFRED, cried, 250

"What tidings of ALSWITHA? Now declare!

"Yet, stay awhile! I cannot hear it yet!—

"Speak on!"

ODDUNE replied, "I ask'd the Dane

"Of one, his Captive; claim'd her liberty.

"Take her! the Chieftain cried. Yonder she dwells!

"I found her! brought her safe! and now she waits,

"Monarch! at thy tent door."

ALSWITHA heard,

And instant enter'd! To the King she rush'd!

ALFRED beheld her! In each other's arms,

Speechless they stand! When with ecstatic joy, 260

ALFRED exclaim'd, "And is it thee? oh Queen!

"Beloved ALSWITHA? God of Heaven, inspire

"This heart with everlasting gratitude!

"But I must hear thy tale!" replied the King.

"Where hast thou been? what furthur hast thou suffer'd?

"What ills endured that I know nothing of?—

ALSWITHA answer'd, dignified yet mild,—

Looking attention. "As I told thee once,

"If e'er thou saw me living, thou should'st find,

"My soul still pure!—Before my gracious Lord, 270

"Such do I stand! and thou art still the same—

"Sole inmate, and sole idol of my heart."

ALFRED exclaim'd, leaning on her he loved,
" Saints envy not, or they might think of me!
" Now will I hear thee! yet, awhile forbear!
" ODDUNE and I first must survey the camp."

275

Which said, the Monarch with the Chief retired.

END OF BOOK XX.

ALFRED. BOOK XXI.

ARGUMENT.

ALSWITHA relates the events which had happened to her since she had separated from Alfred.

FROM the camp visit, ALFRED sought his tent,
And with him ODDUNE, anxious to be told
How fared ALSWITHA, since that fatal hour
When GUTHRUM seized, and with unpitying heart
Bore her away. ALSWITHA thus began:

5

“ My lord, my husband, thou for whom my heart
“ Its keenest pangs hath felt, I need not say
“ What joy this hour affords me, from the change
“ Which Heaven hath wrought. Oh ALFRED! oh my Lord!
“ Great is God’s mercy! He hath veil’d himself 10
“ But to shine forth more glorious; He hath frown’d,
“ And for a little moment hid his face,
“ To try the heart he loved, and purify
“ By ills and crosses—Wisdom’s ministers.

“ Thou askest me to name the varied scenes, 15
“ This heart hath known, since, 'mid the Abbey walls,
“ We cried farewell. These scenes, had I the power
“ Should with oblivion dwell, and every shade
“ Of past remembrance, die away, no more
“ To rouse my dormant soul. Yet thou hast ask'd, 20
“ And I will tell thee tho' it cost me dear.

“ But three long days after thou bad'st adieu,
“ We, from the Abbey turrets, spied the Danes,
“ Fierce coming on. A sight that made us look,
“ Yet speak not, each with terror wild. At length, 25
“ They reach'd the walls! Their hideous yells were hear'd!
“ Their torches flash'd! Their blows, the ponderous gates
“ Answer'd with deaf'ning roar! Each look'd to God.

“ The Abbot was a christian, good and true,
“ And when thou wentest, often talk'd of thee, 25
“ And prais'd thy words, and loved thy little babe;
“ And when he saw the wasting Danes draw nigh,
“ He trembled. Hear, he cried, that noise! The gates,
“ Long, cannot stand. Give me the babe! he said,
“ Turning to me, and fled, he knew not where; 30
“ I follow'd. In my heart there was no fear,
“ I did not think of thee, my babe forgot!
“ For with excess of feeling, feeling fled!
“ I seem'd a stone become! But from this dream
“ Loud groans awaked me! for the doors were forced!
“ The pitiless Danes throughout the place spread death!

“ Now could I hear the miserable cry,
“ Of mercy! mercy! In the Abbot's face
“ Appear'd despair. I cried, Give me the child!
“ Resolved to fly, yet little knowing how. 40
“ The Abbot answer'd, Woman, follow me!
“ Not certain, yet is death!—but hark!—the noise!
“ The flames, they rage! Upward I look'd and view'd
“ Thick smoke and fire!—Again heart-rending cries!
“ We saw hope gone! I think the Abbot said, 45
“ Oh God, Thou yet art great! Vouchsafe thy aid!
“ Oh God deliver us! Which said, he rush'd
“ Across the court—I follow'd him! We reach'd
“ The wall that bounded it! High Heaven inspired,
“ Our limbs with strength miraculous; and soon 50
“ We climb'd its height, 'mid smoke and the loud cry
“ Of death around us. Down the Abbot leap'd!
“ He had my child! I follow'd! Down I leap'd!
“ When to the earth I came, I look'd around
“ For child or guide, all was one waste of smoke! 55
“ Forward I sped, impetuous, but in vain;
“ Yet still I ran, fleet as the bounding Roe,
“ For hope still whisper'd further was my child!
“ But yet I saw him not!
“ Distracting thought!
“ He died! The danish sword upon him fell! 60
“ Low lies my infant!—Tho' Thy will be done,
“ Oh God! I would have kept him here!”
The King
Seem'd prone to speak, yet check'd himself; when thus

ALSWITHA cried: " Soon to some trees I came,
" And from the thicket, stood and look'd around. 65
" When o'er the plain the fierce wind swept along,
" And for a moment made all clear, I saw—
" Ruin before me—one vast heap of fire!
" And tho' far distant, yet upon the gale,
" Fitfull, that pass'd along, I could perceive 70
" The voice of dying man, faint, but most clear,
" That made my feverish and tumultuous heart,
" Throb audibly. I thus escaped myself!
" Thankful I stood!—but yet no child was near!

" Oh what the hopes and fears a mother feels!
" Her offspring now, in all its innocence
" And playful gaiety, delights the eye;
" While in her bounding heart, spontaneous, rise
" The rapt'rous feeling; and she looks and smiles
" As all around were one smooth glassy sea 80
" Of living pleasure; she extends her eye
" Through distant times, and sees her child arise,
" To fame and worth and greatness, paying well
" Parental care.—But now the north-wind comes;
" And on its tender head beats hard! No sun 85
" Chases the black clouds far! The storm increases!
" And in one fatal hour, all joy, all hope,
" Flies, and the branchless tenant of the plain,
" Sorrows, 'till death, its leafy honors flown."
The tear, her anguish told. She spake again. 90

" When I beheld no child, trembling, I cried,

“ Death hath o’erwhelm’d him! As I mournful stood
“ And seem’d a thing deserted, through my mind,
“ As tho’ by power miraculous, I felt,
“ A sudden and mysterious placidness, 95
“ That made me feel, like some unbodied saint,
“ When he looks down upon his earthly friends,
“ And marks their sorrow, yet, beholding, knows,
“ All, sent in mercy. Such I seem’d to feel,
“ And tranquil, journey’d on, unknowing where, 100
“ For yet methought there was a God in Heaven.

“ Now to the skirts of a dark wood I came.
“ ’Twas night; upon the ground I lay and slept.
“ Ere morn appear’d I rose, and travelled on
“ With vain hope seeking thee, on whom my heart
“ Lean’d, as its only stay. The days pass’d by,
“ And yet I wander’d. Food I oft obtain’d
“ From bush or bramble, but, the craving pang
“ Of nature, now increas’d, and the sad thought,
“ Seem’d cheering, that my earthly end drew near :
“ But then I thought of thee! “ I yet will live,”
“ Cried I; “ Almighty Father, spare my life!”

“ Surveying a near valley, I espied,
“ What once had been an Abbey, mouldering now :
“ The which I sought, and, desolation, deem’d, 115
“ My best security from wandering Danes.
“ I enter’d. Dreary look’d the scene around!
“ The Heavens were still, and I could only hear

" The distant night-bird; such the solemn hush,
" All things invested. Now the Moon peep'd out. 120
" As thus I shivering stood, methought I heard
" Footstep approaching! when I saw a man
" Enter the porch, and stately pass the nitch,
" Wherein I stood. I fled! he follow'd me
" And cried, Who art thou? say! I thus replied:
" Pity the wretched!—Art thou one of us?—
" A Saxon? Yes, the warrior cried, I am!
" A servant true of ALFRED our good King,
" Who, God be prais'd! is safe. This gave me joy,
" Such as no words can say. He then inquired, 130
" Fervent and often, how I thither came;
" And if of ALFRED's Queen, I aught had heard,
" For that his King believed that she was dead—
" Murder'd in Glastonbury. I replied,
" (Wishing to hide my name, yet meet with thee)
" Some rumour I had heard that yet she lived,
" But that to thee alone, more would I say.
" And as thy face we sought, if e'er I vow'd,
" Earnest, to God, it was from that good hour,
" When next I saw thee, ever, near to dwell, 140
" And part with life, rather than part with thee."

ALFRED exclaim'd, " And truly didst thou vow!
" This is that hour of meeting! We are hence,
" If Heaven approve, never to part 'till death."
A smile of meaning sent from heart to heart, 145
Was the Queen's answer. When again she spake.

“ Whilst thus I journey’d, fill’d with the high hope
“ Of seeing thee; on a near hill, I spied
“ The danish army! Vainly did I plead—
“ Seiz’d was ALSWITHA.

“ Now must I declare 150
“ Something of GUTHRUM; something of that Dane
“ Who made me thus a Captive, and ’till now
“ In bondage held.

“ One lesson have I learn’d,
“ Since last I saw thee, ALFRED! well to know—
“ That sometimes ’mid the worst of men, the eye 155
“ Fixes on one, who, from some innate cause,
“ Some secret principle, rises above
“ The virtues of his station. Hath not Heaven
“ This mystery appointed, to instruct
“ Poor erring mortals, that within one pale, 160
“ All goodness cent’reth not?—That different tribes
“ And different faiths contain some excellence
“ By little minds unthought of, who would fain,
“ Make for themselves, alone, the good sun shine?
“ GUTHRUM the Dane, whose Captive I became, 165
“ Was this superior man! Tho’ nurs’d in wars,
“ And with the harden’d, nurtured, him I found
“ Firm to his oath! Inflexible as truth!
“ Just to his fancied duties!

“ In the Camp,
“ Following her father, one, his daughter dwelt; 170
“ And, wonder, ALFRED! when to thee I tell,
“ How good she was—worthy of such a sire.

“ To her I owe full many comforts, hours,
“ Of something like contentment, for I talk’d,
“ To her and GUTHRUM, of th’ Eternal Power 175
“ That dwelt on high, who made the glorious sun—
“ This wonderous world, and all created things;
“ Who form’d the universe—th’ Almighty named.

“ They listen’d to me, and they seem’d to love
“ The words I spake: but when I check’d his wrath
“ And told of that forgiveness God required
“ From man to man, he cried, “ It cannot be!
“ Forgiveness didst thou say? Forgive a foe!
“ The injured, pardon! ’Tis not in man’s heart!
“ And never will I deem it possible
“ ’Till for myself I see—that which thou say’st! 185
“ A christian taught to love and to forgive!
“ Pass over wrongs! and for the evil thing,
“ Return the good!—Tell to Credulity
“ This tale, I heed it not!”

“ Enough, to say,
“ I found his mind, fired with wild prejudice, 190
“ Yet true to that small ray of mental light,
“ Heaven had vouchsafed. Who thus the same can say,
“ Happy is he!

“ Before that castle’s walls,
“ We now arrived, where ODDUNE lay, the man
“ Whom next to thee, Danes most abhorred, and vow’d
“ Soon to destroy.

“ There is a tale most sad!

“ To this my breast, the thought, such terror brings,
“ And will in thine such tumult work, that I,
“ Fain would forget it, for myself and thee :
“ Yet innocence fears nothing but the word 200
“ Spoken in secret! —HUBBA, that foul Dane!
“ Beheld ALSWITHA!—More, I cannot say;
“ But, that to GUTHRUM, yonder Dane, thou ow’st,
“ That here I stand! Had he renounced his oath,
“ And at most awful threats and solemn prayers, 205
“ Ceas’d his protection—this good friend, she cried,
“ (And from her bosom drew a poignard forth)
“ Should have preserved me spotless. From that hour,
“ My foe was HUBBA, fierce, implacable.
“ How for my blood he sought, thou know’st.”

The King
Grew pale and trembled. Thus again she spake:

“ Yes, thank that Dane, who yet survives the fight,
“ GUTHRUM, for he with that high mind, which shews
“ The soul’s nobility, exclaim’d, Oh Chief!
“ This heart hath sworn, ’till death itself draw near,
“ Yon Captive to protect, and, by this sword!
“ Safe shall she be.
“ It were a painful task,
“ To name their boisterous strife. A part thou heard’st!
“ Often must thou have ponder’d on the thought,
“ Why Chieftains, like the Danes, should thus forget
“ Their common cause, and in contentious broils 220
“ Spend their best time.—This is that secret, deep!
“ HUBBA forgot all wrath but wrath for one

" Who ne'er offended him. At such an hour,
 " Thou mettest me, oh ALFRED! and to think,
 " The pangs that then I felt, but possible, 225
 " Me to o'ertake again—chiefly for thee—
 " Madness would bring.

" After thou fled'st the camp,
 " What consternation seized the Danes! They ask'd,
 " Earnest for thee, the Harper, and awhile
 " Thought thee to air dissolved, and, sudden changed
 " To some thy proper shape: for they believed,
 " Thou wert some deity. When one drew near,
 " And said, at dead of night, whilst the winds howl'd,
 " Thou passed'st through the gate, to the near shore
 " To bathe in Ocean. HUBBA cried aloud 230
 " Truly that man was LOKE, for he hath used
 " To change his form, and through the ocean waves
 " Dart rapid.* From the moment him I saw,
 " I knew the God!" With this belief they lost
 " Thoughts of pursuit, and for the coming fight
 " Made ready; vowing to the gods they served,
 " Thy mortal race was short; approaching death,
 " For thee and thine, as was to-morrow's dawn
 " Certain. I thought it true! and felt within,
 " Cold as the heart where hope's sun never shines.

" The Danes had vow'd, in solemn rites to spend

* Loke, having once offended the gods, fled from them, and assuming the form of a salmon, jumped into the river, by which means, he, for a long time, escaped their vigilance.

" Nine days for their success; when IVAR cried,
" Impatient of restraint, panting for war,
" What tho' three days of unexpired mirth
" Demand our stay, why should we waste our time?
" Is not the Saxon King now gathering strength?
" To-morrow we will hence depart! Our vows
" Hereafter will we keep, this hour demands
" Dependence on our own unconquer'd swords.
" HUBBA exclaim'd, Abhorrent thought! Forbear 250
" That impious deed! Yet, if thou wilt depart,
" Shrink not from slaughter! glut your swords with blood!
" Nor let one Saxon live to tell the tale
" Of that day's battle when we next shall meet;
" For by the eternal gods each man shall die!" 255

" What force was thine I knew not, and I fear'd
" A night of horrors, more intensely dark,
" Was gathering round.

" The Danes departed now
" Thee to o'ertake; and I too follow'd them
" With the good damsel. To the castle near 260
" We came, when feeling so o'erpower'd my mind
" That I became insensible; my soul,
" Of past existence, lost all traces, sounds
" Fell from my ear, and to the world around
" Dead I became. How long entranced I sat, 265
" I cannot answer, when behind I heard,
" Some voice exclaim, My Queen! I turn'd and saw
" Brave ODDUNE, and in phrenzying wonder cried,

- " What man art thou?—The rest, thou knowest well.
 " That here I stand, Oh God, behold my heart! 270
 " And if it be not grateful, make it such!
 " Now, would I speak to thee. For all thy cares,
 " Thy dangers and dismays, while yet I bore
 " Captivity, sorrow consumed my frame,
 " And I forgot myself with fears for thee. 275
 " But thou are safe! Henceforth shalt thou enjoy
 " Good days and many! I will strive to wean
 " Thy mind from past misfortunes! Joy shall now
 " Bless thee the more, and thou shalt find sincere—
 " ALSWITHA'S love—My Husband, and my Lord!"

ALFRED transported rose,—clasping her hand,
 And cried, " Best gift of Heaven! Soother of care!
 " Companion! Friend! Instructor! What so soft
 " As the mild tone that from affection comes?—
 " So lovely as the human eye, that beams 285
 " True tenderness?—Favor'd of mortal kind,
 " Whoe'er you be, that in this world have found
 " The heart of friendship, give to Heaven your praise!
 " But if that friend, the nearest of all names,
 " A wife's should bear—think yourselves bless'd indeed!"

ALSWITHA said, hiding the tear of joy,
 " Thou hast my gratitude! But, good my Lord!
 " Pardon the word that might disturb thy mind,
 " With dreadful recollections. Whilst we stand,
 " And praise our Maker, for the aid vouchsafed 295

"To us his servants, I would hope, no crime,
"Seems it to him, to cast one lingering thought
"On those no more, and o'er their memory drop
"Nature's fond tear. But, ALFRED! thou and I,
"Still must remember, with deep agony,
"One loss—our child, that on that fatal day
"Made us forever wretched."

O'er her face

"She cast her hand in silence. When, the King,
"Rose, and thus spake. "ALSWITHA! I do fear
"To tell thy happiness." The Queen exclaim'd,
"What words were those? Declare! Is my child safe?—
"Sport not with death!"

ALFRED replied, "He is!

"Thy child is safe!" After a moment's pause,
ALSWITHA calmly said, "This can I bear!
"Great sorrows, and great joys alike are link'd
"To dreaminess! Is my child safe? Oh God!
"Father of Heaven and Earth—spare my weak head!
"Drive me not crazy through the earth! Allay
"This throbbing of my bosom! Didst thou say
"My child was safe? Where is he? Bring him to me!
"Thou tent, disclose him!"

ALFRED said, "Beloved,

"Oh stay thy anguish! check the vehemence
"Of these thy warm affections! Soon, full soon,
"Thou shalt behold thy child! thou shalt embrace,
"Upon the coming day, thy darling boy!
"He hastens from a lowly dwelling near."

By transport overpower'd, the Queen awhile,
Stood silent. When the King to ODDUNE spake.
" This wondrous tale—ALSWITHA's, thou hast heard,
" And doubtless didst anticipate the words
" Which now I speak.—GUTHRUM the danish Chief,
" Hence, is my friend ! Haste to the castle, say,
" He needs not dread thy Monarch ! With apt words,
" Root out his many fears ! and let him know,
" I am not wrathful." When ALSWITHA cried :

" Chieftain ! one thing I ask. Inquire for her—
" GUTHRUM's fair daughter. This my heart doth yearn
" To shew the Damsel kindness." ODDUNE heard,
And, bending, left the presence of the King.

END OF BOOK XXI.

ALFRED. BOOK XXII.

ARGUMENT.

ODDUNE again visits Guthrum and persuades him to submit to Alfred. He consents to see the King; Alfred receives him at first with assumed anger; Alswitba pleads for Guthrum, who is pardoned; Guthrum intreats to become a Christian, and ascribes his conversion to Alswitba; he deplors the supposed death of his daughter; she presents herself to him. The Danish Chief and his daughter depart to the Castle. Oddune commended by Alswitba.

ODDUNE renew'd his visit to the Dane;
And as the castle hall he enter'd, stern,
GUTHRUM approach'd and cried, "Thou busy foe!
"What seek'st thou now? May we not perish here,
"Safe from thy visits, and at least enjoy, 5
"Peace in our final moments? Haste thou back!
"I hate thy converse! 'Tis to me more foul
"Than screams to drowsiness! Proud Saxon! Life—
"We know its limits! and that soon these eyes
"Closed will be found! yet think not thou to gain 10
"On easy terms this castle! We are Danes!
"And 'till the hungry crows look down upon us,

" And think us food for them, so thin and wan,
" As on the walls we lie, gazing on ye
" Our weak assailants, never shall you tread 20
" This spot triumphant."

ODDUNE cried, " Forbear!
" I come not now with threats but promises,
" In patience, hear my words!"

The Dane exclaim'd,
" I hear thee not! Wouldst thou attempt to sooth
" The Bear with promises, when he beheld 25
" The Hunters round him? Neither talk with me!
" My path is plain! Death will anon be ours!
" But, 'till it come, we will aspire to live
" Worthy of death, and to deserve the joys
" That wait the valiant."

ODDUNE cried again; 30
" I do not bring thee death, but rather life—
" For thee and thine. These are the words I bear.—
" Submit to ALFRED! on his mercy lean!
" For he is one who harbours not revenge
" And hate remorseless. Trust his clemency, 35
" And thou shalt find thy apprehensions vain,
" Thy fears ungrounded."

Said the wrathful Dane,
" Thou seest me thus thy prey, but do not add
" Insult, where courage may not shew itself!
" Dost thou suspect of fear? I know it not! — 40
" And didst thou think this heart, mercy would sue
" From England's Monarch? Never shall the sun

" See GUTHRUM crouch before the victor's frown

" And ask him, pardon!"

ODDUNE cried, " Thy doubts,

" Thy apprehensions, call them what thou wilt, 45

" Are most unfounded! ALFRED boasts a heart

" That never felt contempt for any man!

" Approach our King and he will grant thee life."

The Dane replied, " Would'st thou, by one asleep,

" Believe the soft breeze heeded? Nor to me 50

" Talk thou of asking life! It is a gift

" I prize not, and would rather spurn than keep;

" My child is slain! my honor flown! and now

" Wherefore should one, a Dane, desire to live?"

ODDUNE replied, " Let not ideal mists 55

" Before thee float; and Prejudice, that great!

" That mightier mist than all—Quenching the mind!

" Thou lovest not thy life! and fain would'st boast

" Of yielding the small boon, unterrified;—

" Prized but by cowards! Let me ask thee, Dane!

" Not thy proud heart, but that which seldom errs,

" Thy quiet feelings, why thou lovest death.

" Is it some little thing to breathe the air—

" To see the light of Heaven—the glorious sun—

" The azure firmament?—this beauteous world 65

" Of comforts and of wonders infinite?

" Is it some little thing, at early morn,

" To feel the freshness of the gale, that comes
 " Replenish'd with its vivifying powers?—
 " A senseless joy, an idle benefit, 70
 " To wander in the balmy summer morn,
 " Through fields and flowers, drinking the vital air,
 " With fragrance and with odoriferous scents
 " O'erflowing, rousing up the soul to dreams
 " Of immaterial joy, and dim regards, 75
 " Of a sweet something, undefined, yet clear
 " In the soul's confidence—sometime to come?
 " And is it nothing deem'd, to taste the grape,
 " Nature's sweet beverage?—or the milky ale?
 " Nothing to view the fruits that charm the eye, 80
 " And please the taste—scatter'd through every clime,
 " All nations blessing!
 " Were our ears bestow'd
 " To feed disgust, and in our minds excite
 " Perpetual jarrings? Can we wander forth
 " And hear the wild-wood music—birds and things,
 " Yielding their minstrelsy, in soothing notes
 " Or soul-inspiring, and all harmony
 " To the tuned spirit? Can we scorn, what springs
 " From silent melody—from the sweet tongues
 " Of leaf, and branch and flower, all choristers 90
 " Sounding their Maker's praise? Can this our world—
 " Its wonders infinite, no joyance yield?
 " No comfort? and no promise give the soul
 " That should delay its wanderings, and inspire
 " One wish to linger 'mid a scene so fair? 95

" And is there nothing in that foe to man,
 " Death, that affrights thee? Canst thou think unmoved,
 " That this thy frame, shortly beneath the ground
 " Will moulder slow? That these thy comely limbs
 " Which now support the fabric, thou hast long
 " Pamper'd and call'd thyself, will soon supply
 " The earth-worm's banquet? Yields it no dismay—
 " No creeping of the flesh, to think that these
 " Soon must relax, and all which once was thee,
 " Sink in the grave's long quiet? Rouse thyself!
 " Let me conduct thee hence! In ALFRED trust.
 " Here Death must meet thee—there is safety found."

GUTHRUM replied, " Myself, I thought I knew,
 " And my resolves could trust; but, these thy words,
 " Probe deep my heart, and to my view display
 " Thoughts hid before. I never yet have fear'd
 " Death in his fiercest garb; but through my mind
 " A secret dread now passes: these thy words
 " Have dimm'd my understanding, so unhing'd
 " For calm decision, and I seem to wish
 " Longer to live. But, hear I not a voice?—
 " Honor's!—his look is stern! his law severe!
 " How shall I sooth him?" To whom, thus the Chief:

" Brave DANÉ! true honor lies not with the man
 " Who scorns all dangers, and would rather fear
 " His heart asunder, and to savage beasts
 " Cast it, than own the influence of fate

" Which governs all men. Thou hast bravely fought!
 " Now bravely act! Not by disdaining life.
 " With rude and brutal rage, but, by the faith 125
 " Thou placest in another, which best shews
 " What might be placed in thee: ALFRED our King,
 " No unforgiven injury e'er hath felt.
 " Trust him, and live! His worth thou knowest not,
 " And how he prizes valour such as thine!" 130

" Talk not of pardon!" GUTHRUM cried. " Who'er
 " Pardon'd such wrongs as his? Vain thought, away!
 " It cannot be!—I think it cannot be—
 " It cannot be! yet, the experiment
 " Were easy;—Father of the slain! forbear 135
 " That angry look! Where are my senses flown?
 " Thy words, and her's, whom gods preserve! so hide,
 " And so confound all former thoughts, that I—
 " Stagger and wish to live.

What thou hast said

" Of ALFRED's clemency shall now be tried; 140
 " But, if it fail—the penalty? Away!
 " I will attend thee! Chieftain, point the way!
 " By the first look of ALFRED, I may judge
 " Of these thy words—whether I live or die.
 " Now will I seek the danish troops, and name 145
 " GUTHRUM's design."

Then he approach'd and spake.

" Danes! here we stand, cut off from aid, and doom'd
 " To perish in this sad and evil hour—

" Both you and me. Not dying as we ought,
 " In battle, why should death so charm our hearts—
 " So blind our eyes to all that cheers the soul
 " And animates? If honor we can save
 " And save our lives, is it not well? For what,
 " Is there in death, that living man should seek?
 " If in the past fight breathless we had lain, 155
 " There had been hope, but now, within these walls,
 " To perish has no charm for me, if, well,
 " Life can be kept with honor. Britain's King
 " Hath sent yon Chieftain hither, to demand
 " Submission, and hath promis'd well and true 160
 " To grant forgiveness. To my mind it seems
 " Impossible for one so wrong'd to seek
 " Aught but our blood; this Saxon tells me nay;
 " And speaks, full confident, that if we yield
 " These arms, and stoop to one—our bravest foe, 165
 " We yet may live.
 " I will alone repair
 " To yonder camp, and with the Saxon King
 " Treat for your safety.—Venturous the design!
 " If I return not with convenient speed
 " You may conclude my death!—As Danes, then stand
 " Firm to your post, and if you all must die—
 " Die like yourselves! GUTHRUM, untterrified
 " Leaves you to make this perilous attempt."
 He said, whilst words of dubious import came
 From those around him, not of joy or hope, 175

But from despair, that still had consciousness
Of its own state, to know that 'twas despair.

The Chieftain now, with ODDUNE, readily,
Pass'd through the arch-way, whilst all mark'd them, sad,
Tho' not a tongue was heard, nor sound, save one—
The rustling wind, that 'mid the turrts moan'd,
Making each heart sick with its hollow voice.

Whilst journeying on, to GUTHRUM, ODDUNE thus:
"Had'st thou not once, good Dane! a daughter,—one,
"Known to thy female Captive?" "I had once!"
Answer'd the Dane, "now pray thee, ask no more!
"Upon my wrongs, I think, words suit not me."

And now they reach'd the Saxon Camp, when thus
ODDUNE address'd the Dane. "I, first, will seek
"ALFRED, then lead thee to his presence." Straight
ODDUNE approach'd his Monarch's tent, where sat
The King and Queen, with one—a Damsel fair.
When ALFRED cried, "Good ODDUNE! instant say,
"Where is brave GUTHRUM, have thy words prevail'd
"To draw him hither."

ODDUNE cried, "They have!
"The warrior waits!" When ALFRED rose and said,
"Since thou departed'st to the castle, near,
"Within our camp yon maiden hath arrived—
"GUTHRUM's fair daughter. As to meet our force
"The Danes proceeded, from her safe abode

" She ventured, by affection urged, to mark
 " How fared her father. When the battle ceased,
 " She with the routed army fled, nor where,
 " Heeding, her thoughts were wild: our forces met,
 " And here conducted her. Behold her now 205
 " Loved by that Queen, whom she so oft hath served!"
 When turning to ALSWITHA, thus he spake:

" Take now thy diadem! assume the robe,
 " Beseeming royalty, the same will I;
 " And let the danish maiden screen herself. 210
 " ODDUNE, conceal our thoughts! when this is done,
 " Let GUTHRUM enter."

Now the royal pair
 Sat in due state; when ODDUNE left the tent,
 And soon return'd—leading the ancient Dane.
 When first he enter'd, ALFRED cried, " Oh man! 215
 " What thinkest thou the punishment deserved
 " For crimes like thine." These words GUTHRUM confirm'd
 In dreadful expectations. He replied,
 " No punishment! My crime is that alone
 " Of soldier vanquish'd! This may death procure,
 " But that no Dane regards as punishment."

ALFRED exclaim'd, " Proud man, approach the King
 " Whom thou hast injured!
 —GUTHRUM nearer came,
 When ALFRED thus: " Thy triumph now is o'er!
 " Thy power is flown! yet, let me hear thee say, 225

"Wilt thou become my subject? Wilt thou own
 "Me, thy liege Lord?" "Never!" replied the Dane.
 "Within thine eye I see deep vengeance sit,
 "And wrath that seals my ruin! Let me die!
 "Instant, I dread it not! nor fear the blow 230
 "That makes me free forever. Take my life!
 "Eager, he cried. One blow and I am past
 "Thy hatred and my own consuming shame."

He said, and, drawing near the King, held out
 His naked breast. When, looking up, he knew 235
 The Harper's visage! Sudden dropt his arm!
 His cheek from crimson to a deadly white—
 Turn'd, and he shiver'd. Every tongue was mute,
 And every eye fix'd on the wondering Dane.
 When GUTHRUM thus exclaim'd—Looking so wild,
 That Madness seeing him, again might start
 Itself to reason.

"Certain, now is death!
 "Each moment is new torment! To survive
 "Blasts my last hope!"
 "Thou shalt not die!" exclaim'd
 The Queen, and, hastening from her seat, appear'd
 Before the trembling Dane. "Thou shalt not die!"
 She cried, "for I am grateful, thou art good,
 "And shalt be happy." At her words, the Dane
 Look'd up and saw—his Captive! Wilder still
 Roll'd his full eyes! confused conceptions rose—
 Madd'ning his soul. When GUTHRUM thus exclaim'd:

" ODIN! are these thy halls? Where is the mead?
 " Where are my laughing brethren? Where the souls,
 " Ordain'd to teach me holy mysteries?
 " Where are the Danes who in the past fight fell, 255
 " And rush'd to join thee? Am I here alone?
 " No eye but mine! What mean these visions? Gods!
 " Have ye no feeling for the aged GUTHRUM?
 " Where are ye? Who art thou?" he said, and look'd
 Fierce on ALSWITHA.

" I am she," she cried, 260
 " Truly, thy Captive, whom thou oft hast saved
 " When death drew near, and I will now, my hand
 " Stretch out for thee! Pardon this Dane, oh King!
 " A nobler and more estimable man
 " Lives not to share thy favour! and I plead 265
 " With my whole soul, that thou wilt name him free."

ALFRED drew near the wondering Dane, and cried,
 " GUTHRUM, accept thy life, and with it, too,
 " Brave man! my gratitude."

Still look'd the Dane,
 With wistful eye, unknowing, if the things 270
 Were real or the baseless fantasies
 That float before the mind, at the dim hour
 When dreams perplex it.—Round the tent again,
 He look'd, to satisfy his doubting mind:
 Then at the King, the Queen. When ALFRED spake:
 " Chieftain, dismiss thy doubts! No fancied scene

" Is this before thee. Thou art yet on earth!
 " And I am ALFRED! I the Harper am,
 " Whose harp thou saved'st in the danish camp :
 " Nor doubt thy sight! for this is really her—
 " Thy Captive —Britain's Queen! who, but for thee,
 " Now in the dust had lain, and I been found—
 " A friendless, lonely, miserable man!
 " I know thy character! I know thy heart!
 " And prize thee, but hereafter hope to prize,
 " Doubly, when better known. Behold in me,
 " Thy true and constant friend!"

" This is too much!"

GUTHRUM exclaim'd. " Man's mind was never form'd
 " To bear such conflicts! Didst thou say, forgive?
 " Call me thy friend? say life was mine? Nor yet,
 " I cannot trust my senses! Is it so?"

" Yes," answer'd, ALFRED; " yes, I tell thee yes!
 " Thou art forgiven! Thou art ALFRED's friend!
 " Now, of me, ask some favour! be it great!
 " Thou need'st not fear its magnitude! Declare!
 " And I will teach thee, what thou hast to hope
 " In after times, by the reply I make."

Cried GUTHRUM, with surpassing majesty,
 " This be the favour, which alone I ask!—
 " The greatest, and most holily desired!
 " Let me partake thy faith! Let me receive,
 " The name of christian, and embrace, like thee,

" That true religion, which can dictate thus,
 " And thus perform. Let me renounce," he cried,
 " That faith which I too long have call'd my own!
 " Which, not like thine, conducts to peace and love,
 " And kindly intercourse, but, wrath and blood,
 " And discords horrible.

" To her thy Queen,
 " Who stands beside thee, I this feeling owe!
 " Her words ere now have roused my dawning soul
 " To things immortal—scenes invisible—
 " Piercing my spirit. Of her words I thought,
 " And seem'd to feel some kindred sympathies—
 " The approving voice within; but when she spake
 " That christians could forgive the bitterest foe, 315
 " And love requite for hatred; this I cried,
 " Can never be! yours are the sounding words
 " That have no meaning, but, I now have found,
 " Christians can pardon!—Thou hast pardon'd me!"

ALFRED with rapture answer'd, " This is joy, 320
 " Not of earth's kind! to find a man, like thee,
 " Whom I so honor! by that Power divine
 " Who governs all things, call'd to the true faith.
 " But what exalts my joy, is, that this change,
 " Under high Heaven, hath reach'd thee from a source,
 " I little thought of—from my captived Queen!
 " Dear to my heart's best feelings! dearer far
 " Than all earth's treasures! next to God prefer'd,
 " And the great duties of my regal birth.

" Who now shall question Providence? who doubt,
 " That He who this stupendous fabric rear'd
 " Upholds and governs it? Hence have I learn'd,
 " Never to unlearn! that the man who trusts,
 " Omnipotence, shall in the end perceive,
 " All things were right."

ALSWITHA thus replied, 335

" Such is my faith! May we indulge the hope,
 " That GUTHRUM, who, ere this, true worth possess'd
 " And half the christian's graces, now may shine,
 " With cloudless light, honor'd and loved by all.

" One question may I ask thee? GUTHRUM! say,
 " Where is thy daughter? Where is she I loved?
 " That noble maiden, who so many hours
 " Of comfort gave, when all the world to me
 " Seem'd blank and dead? Now shall this heart display,
 " The gratitude I once could but express.— 345
 " Thou speakest not!"

GUTHRUM, distracted, cried,
 " Spare me that thought!" Within his heart there seem'd
 Hard conflicts. " I am sad," he said, " a loss
 " Hath fall'n upon me—very hard to bear!—
 " In the past fight—my daughter fell, and now— 350
 " I am most wretched!—Duteous was my child
 " As ever father had! a loving child!—
 " I could have welcom'd death, her to have saved!
 " My child! my comfort! never more shall I
 " Behold thee, oh my daughter! Thou art gone!—

"Sweet is thy mem'ry." As he stood and paused,
Swift from her hiding place, his daughter sprang,
And cried, "My father! I am yet alive!"
The old man half exclaim'd, "Impossible!"
"My daughter?—Yes thou art! Oh God of Heaven,
"Let me not die!" Upon her neck he fell,
And each in silence soothed the throbbing heart,
And dropt the mutual tear—unspeakable,
Of worth and meaning!

When the King thus said:
"I share your transport! Long may you enjoy 365
"The happiness you both so well deserve!

"GUTHRUM, my friend, attend! The hour is late.
"Befits thee now to seek thy castle, near,
"And to the Danes, declare my purpose; say,
"For GUTHRUM'S sake I will forgive all wrongs 370
"And grant free pardon! Tell them to confide,
"In Britain's King! And if with thee they chuse
"To own my sway, and live beneath my crown,
"I will receive them! they shall be with us
"One people, whom to serve and to protect, 375
"Shall be my fervent wish, my constant care.

"Tell them, the fleet, that to these shores convey'd
"IVAR their Chief, and all his followers' wives,
"Not wholly is consumed; each woman lives,
"By me protected! If they here remain, 380

" Soon shall they meet, and form one family
" With us their friends. But if they rather seek,
" With thee, their native land,—safe shall they go!

" But there is one thing more of which to speak.
" Return thou for the night with this thy child! 385
" Be here to-morrow! Thou hast yet to share
" A holy rite, baptism; known of all
" Who truly form Christ's kingdom militant."

GUTHRUM replied. " Most earnestly I seek
" This proof of my conviction and full faith 390
" In Christ my Saviour! On the coming morn,
" Thou shalt behold me here!" This said, the Dane,
Straight with his daughter left the Saxon tent.

To ODDUNE then, ALFRED his words address'd:
" Chieftain I prize thee, and would fain behold 395
" All happiness attend thee, but, what joy
" Can solitude afford? Society,
" The smiles of her we love, th' endearing wife,
" The hopeful offspring; these the charms of earth,
" These give a zest to all things here below, 400
" And all beside possessing, but declares
" How sad the lot of him who cannot boast
" These soul-enchanting treasures. May I say,
" If beauty can attract, affection charm,
" Or constancy delight thee—gallant Chief, 405
" Think of yon Damsel!"

ODDUNE thus replied:

" GUTHRUM's fair daughter, who shall not admire?
 " Her charms I own, her virtues I revere;
 " But, never must I strive by word or deed
 " To win the Damsel's love. Her I respect, 410
 " But more I cannot. To another Maid
 " My vows are plighted; and I trust, ere long,
 " To taste domestic joys, and emulate
 " The virtues of my great and noble King."

ALSWITHA cried, " Brave man! Thou hast a soul
 " Which all should reverence, all should imitate.—
 " The flower of British youth for her shall strive,
 " Yet never one more worthy than thyself;
 " ODDUNE, I like thy frank and manly speech!
 " There is a race, vilest of human kind, 420
 " Who rove from Fair to Fair, all Maids alike,
 " Deck'd with gay smiles, and courteous in all deeds—
 " Boasting of conquests. On their tongues are found
 " Maxims of worth and true humanity;
 " And they can loudly talk of right and wrong, 425
 " Of honor, and injustice, and true love,
 " Repeated oft with meanings light as air.
 " Such of eternal constancy will vow,
 " Or, at reserved affection humbly glance,
 " Or less presuming, but of equal force, 430
 " Speak only with the language of the eye:
 " And thus with low and base hypocrisy
 " Winding false way to woman's gentle heart.
 " These shadows of true men, might dread the thought

BOOK XXII.

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" To tarnish female honor, but would smile

435

" To murder female peace, and, unconcern'd—

" Nay with self compliments and secret pride

" See grief corrode the cheek of innocence—

" Behold the wreck of that maid's happiness,

" Whose only fault was unrequited love.

440

" Such is not **ODDUNE!** Thou a soldier art

" In name and spirit. May thy sex like thee,

" Protect, not wound, the fond and guileless hearts

" Of Albion's beauteous daughters."

ODDUNE bow'd,

Graceful, to earth, and from the tent retired.

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END OF BOOK XXII.

ALFRED. BOOK XXIII.

ARGUMENT.

THE Vision of the Guardian Angel.

WHILST ALFRED, in his tent, at midnight lay,
He saw or thought he saw, a Spirit, tall,
And of majestic port. His eye was mild,
Yet one fix'd look he had, as tho' he stood,
Immoveable, from ages infinite, 5
That came not but appear'd. Like some huge crag
Of marble, towering high, all white, whose head
The winter storms have beaten, and the winds,
Wrathful, assail'd;—yet still it looks the same—
Through time, in all its revolutions, bears 10
The same eternal aspect, white and still.

The Monarch trembled, as distinct he view'd
Th' unearthly form, whose raiment shone with rays,
Effulgent, self-created, diamond-like,

Making the darkness day, and o'er the tent 15
 Casting celestial splendors. ALFRED, long,
 Endured the terror expectation brings;
 When in a slow and solemn tone he cried,
 " Spirit, what seek'st thou?" 'Till the sound had ceased
 And each vibration ended, that might check 20
 Communion, immaterial, all was still;
 When thus the Spirit answer'd:

" I am one
 " Of the innumerable host who throng
 " This lower world, Communicants of good ;
 " I am thy GUARDIAN ANGEL! From the hour
 " This world received thee, I have been thy friend 25
 " And ever near, commissioned by high Heaven
 " To screen thee from the powers that roam abroad,
 " Hostile to human kind. Me, God hath sent
 " To tell thee of his wondrous ways, and name
 " Immortal truths, such as shall cheer thy mind,
 " Hereafter, in the great and trying scenes 30
 " That lie before thee. For, prosperity,
 " Tho' all desire to have—few well can bear.
 " Thou art appointed to great good! thy reign,
 " Thy matchless deeds, shall to succeeding times
 " Shine forth resplendent, and example prove 35
 " To distant ages. I am chiefly sent,
 " Thee to instruct, in truths, needful to know
 " In thy high station, yet, if thou require
 " Knowledge of other sort, I may declare,
 " Tho' brief;—for thou hast in Jehovah's sight 40

" Favour obtain'd.

Whilst chain'd to this low earth,

" And fluttering far and wide, busied with cares

" The heart consuming, listening to the voice

" Of many tempters, loud, importunate,

" All is a dream! The man who wealth pursues, 45

" Toiling both night and morn; with earnest brow,

" Counting his gains, and on his future joys

" Dwelling enraptured, little thinks how near

" That foe may be which blasts the rich man's all.

" And whosoe'er pursues the damsel coy, 50

" Fantastic Pleasure, pierces his heart through,

" And only dreams. So he who covets fame,

" The tinkling sound that on the breeze is heard,

" Then dies away, shapes insubstantial forms

" In tissue gay, and sighs to find at last 55

" Shadows, unreal:—Wisdom knew them such!—

" All from their dreams awake! If in this world;

" Happy! thrice happy they!

" Yet one there is,

" Wandering awhile below, who does not dream,—

" The christian! he, amid a dreaming world, 60

" With eye wide open, darts his filmless gaze

" Through nature, and with joy beholds it all,

" And calls it very good: in all things sees

" His father's hand, his Maker, his true Friend,

" And blesses it, and with the Holy Spirit 65

" Holds commune.

" This that great reality,

“ Mortals alone can know;—to feel and taste,
“ ’Mid an uncertain world, the true delight,
“ Hope brings, supported by that confidence,
“ Which, of his natural strength, man cannot gain, 70
“ It is the gift of Heaven! Yet he who hopes,
“ Who earnestly implores, who humbly waits,
“ Who views in sin, the first great foe of man,
“ Who prizes holiness, who feels his heart
“ Constrain’d to love his Savior and his God;— 75
“ He, tho’ awhile oppress’d by doubts and fears,
“ Shall in due time receive that precious gift,
“ And, ’mid a jarring and tempestuous world,
“ Walk full of light and peace.

“ Of the vast whole,
“ This universe and all created things,
“ Man glimpses but a speck, the rest is hid,
“ In night, inextricable; so to be
“ ’Till borne beyond the grave, when all shall prove
“ One perfect harmony! The doubtful points 85
“ In man’s existence, that once pierced his mind,
“ And made him sorrowful, shall then appear
“ No sport of chance, but, order’d by that Power
“ Who never err’d. And tho’ thou oft may’st mourn,
“ Evils thou canst not cure, and see th’ event
“ Other than thou designedst, to the heart
“ God only looks. Grieve not where grief is vain!
“ But yield to higher wisdom than thy own,
“ And, as befitteth mortal, patiently
“ Endure in silence.

" Not in th' Eternal's eye 95
 " Is the same deed by different men perform'd!
 " Motives and principles to Him appear,
 " Clear, tho' conceal'd from human scrutiny:
 " And some who bore high titles and great names
 " For many virtues, 'mid their fellow men,— 100
 " Shorn will appear! whilst some, misnamed the weak,
 " The evil, in Heaven's everlasting scroll
 " Foremost will stand! From this learn charity,—
 " Judgement belongs to God. The anathema,
 " Man ill becometh, or the scornful tongue 105
 " That to a weaker brother would exclaim,
 " While lifting the high look, " Approach me not!
 " I am more holy."
 " Strive to enter thou
 " At the strait gate, and for a fallen world
 " Pray fervently! which thou may'st blameless do,
 " Indulging the exstatic and big hope,
 " That yet the time may come, when God shall own
 " Justice appeased, and bid all nature smile.
 " Then would th' eternal Jubilee commence,
 " Rending with shouts Heaven's adamantine gates
 " And starry thrones, when all the seraph choir,
 " Saint and Arch-angel, would their joys proclaim
 " In loud hosannas, that th' Almighty Sire
 " Had pity on the creatures he had made,
 " Who willed not their death, but rather will'd 120
 " Himself to be—Father and God of all.—
 " But these are lofty themes and perilous!

" Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

" Flee thou the monster, Pride. He robs the heart

" Of comforts numberless, involving oft 125

" In storms and tempests, driving Peace afar—

" The blessing which the wise man values most.

" Humility! fairest of mortal garbs,

" And beautiful as morning! hold it dear!—

" It is a heavenly ornament! Be thou 130

" Gentle of spirit, ready to be taught,

" Seeing thy frailty: so shalt thou receive

" Knowledge to cheer thee, wisdom to direct,

" And all things needful.

" Yet, be thou aware!

" Man's mind the full effulgence of all light 135

" May not endure; therefore, be still, nor strive

" To lift the veil Heaven hath seen fit to cast

" O'er many things and in profoundest shades

" Hidden from mortal sight. One thing is clear!—

" God is all good, all great.

" Believing this, 140

" Dive not in that unfathomable gulf,

" Conjecture vague, but with the little light,

" Certain, thou hast, rest satisfied; for more

" Seeking to know, will but with pangs torment,

" And, in the end, make thee forget what is 145

" To guess what may be. Soon the time will come,

" For most, too soon! when all mysterious things

" Shall be made clear, and to th' assembled worlds

- " God's ways to man be justified, and all,
" Cry, " Holy, Holy, Lord of Heaven and Earth!" 150
" Thou hast endured, 'till now, a load of cares,
" Such as have wrung thy heart, and in some hour
" When faithless doubts arose, made thee suspect
" That, 'mid this world, thou wert ordain'd to roam
" A friendless and a solitary thing, 155
" Uncertain whence, and, whither bound, unknown—
" A blank in the creation. Cease to mourn!
" Henceforth when sorrows overwhelm, believe
" They spring from that benignant Power who seeks
" By every little evil—one effect— 160
" His creatures' benefit—to raise their hearts
" From sin to purity, from earth to heaven.
" How different man's from the Almighty's view!
" God often sees prosperity, or pride,
" Or unbelief, or that disastrous foe— 165
" Indifference—offspring of Iniquity!
" Those whom he loves o'ertake, and lest the flood
" Should drown their spirits, bear them far away
" From holiness and healing sympathies,
" Angels, like me, become His ministers, 170
" And bear some needful antidote—Disease—
" Anguish of spirit, or the dread decree
" Which strips them of the baser dross of earth—
" To give them an eternal heritage.
" Yet for thy comfort, more may I declare. 175

“ Such are the joys, in the hereafter world,
“ Which wait the righteous, that, one transient view,
“ One faint perception of the weight of glory,
“ Might from its base, the mind, hurl, and unfit
“ For mortal exercise—therefore conceal’d!— 180
“ Save when the dying man, the christian, looks
“ Beyond this lower world, glimpsing that bliss,
“ The unfading crown that waits him, and the cloud,
“ Bearing Arch-angels, from whose giddy height,
“ They look with open arms, and beckening cry—
“ Approach, bless’d Spirit!” Such may half conceive
“ Heaven’s weight of bliss. And whilst the good man’s speech
“ (When on the verge of the eternal world)
“ Sounds incoherent, wild; to us, around,
“ Attendant angels, other thoughts arise!
“ We hear the broken word, the silent prayer;
“ We mark the look of agonizing joy,
“ When the first beam of immaterial light 195
“ Darts through the mind, and to the countenance
“ Gives heavenly radiance.

“ In the future world,
“ Whereto you haste, tho’ filled with unknown forms,
“ Once inconceivable; tho’ long the eye,
“ Cleans’d from earth’s prejudice, shall view around
“ Innumerable things, all wonderful!
“ Yet, like the scared Bird turning to its nest,
“ It shall delight to view its former state,
“ Dwelling on faded scenes. Whilst gifted thus
“ To see all nature, and behold her page 205

“ Open before their eyes, what most will rouse
“ Astonishment, leaving eternal things,
“ Is this—that men, the creatures of a day,
“ Whilst in their earthly state, a world so fill’d
“ With speaking monitors, so aptly form’d, 210
“ So wisely govern’d, so o’erspread with signs
“ Of goodness and intelligence, should once,
“ Have follow’d the vain forms that cross’d their path;
“ The shadows of a moment! unconcern’d
“ At that advancing and imperious hour 215
“ When Death shall claim his prey, while nature fails,
“ And the sick eye turns inward to find out
“ Its blessed recollections and what joy
“ Faith hath left there—forgetful of that time,
“ When the dread doom approacheth of all flesh—
“ When the loud trump shall sound, and the dead rise
“ To immortality.
“ If minds could doubt
“ Where all is certainty, men might suspect
“ That ever they on mortal ground had trod
“ And heard so clear the voice of Conscience, seen
“ Such proofs of an hereafter, yet remain’d
“ So callous to the certainty, which stood,
“ Like the fair evening star in Heaven’s blue vault
“ When all was dim beside.
“ Angels like me
“ Feel pity for a world lying in sin, 230
“ But pity most is ours, when we behold
“ Immortal souls just peeping into life

“ And ignorant of all things—when we see
“ These babes in knowledge with presumptuous breath
“ Arraign the DEITY ! with critic eye 235
“ Scan all his ways, here of improvements speak,
“ There charge with folly.—Insects of an hour !
“ Before, thus impious, Heaven’s eternal King
“ You venture to instruct, say who you are !
“ Shew your credentials ! In minuter things 240
“ Display your power !—add fragrance to the rose,
“ Or give new splendours to the rising sun.

“ That untamed spirit, PRIDE, which peopled first
“ Hell’s dark abodes, and made Omnipotence 245
“ With thunders shake Heaven’s everlasting thrones,
“ Now strays on earth, urged by whose counsels, man
“ Looks higher than his Maker, and would fain,
“ Direct, not follow—govern, not obey.

“ Before my mission ceases, I must name 250
“ Duties severe, which to all men belong,
“ But, most, a King. Mark, and hereafter live !

“ Thou art establish’d on thy throne ; thy foes
“ Now sleep in death, and thou hast long to live
“ In full prosperity. This is the lot 255
“ To thee appointed. If thy mind be right—
“ If thou preserve thy heart from life’s low stains,
“ And look to God, he never will forsake
“ Thee nor thy house. Yet, ever bear in mind,—

“ Faith, like the bud that to maturity 260
“ Fails to arrive, in the great sight of Heaven,
“ No value holds. But th’ immortal incense
“ That mounts on high, and with its fragrancy
“ Fills the seraphic courts, is this—Pure love
“ Springing from faith, and scattering far and wide 265
“ All excellence; which angels smile to see,—
“ Spreading o’er Heaven a sudden light, which gives
“ New lustre to their pinions, as they wave,
“ Waking harmonious airs.

Look thou to God

“ And ever prize ’bove all created good—
“ Jesus thy Saviour!—the forerunner Christ— 270
“ The pledge of hope—the anchor of the soul—
“ The bright and morning star, whose tranquil beam
“ Shall light thee safe through the dark vale of death;
“ Thy only comfort! He hath been the joy
“ Of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand 275
“ Who now have spread their palms and learn’d to sing
“ Hosannas in the highest; and he, still
“ Will cheer each heir of glory, till that hour
“ When time shall be no more. Men, little think 280
“ What countless and eternal benefits
“ From him proceed—what blessings for his sake
“ God hath prepared, and what felicities
“ Await his true disciples: men who lived
“ Not for themselves but others, and who bore, 285
“ Like their great Master, many a load of woe,
“ And drank affliction’s cup, and walk’d through earth

" Like pilgrims to a better country bound ;
 " Tho' doom'd awhile, by wisdom infinite,
 " To stray through thorns, and bear the buffetings 290
 " Of Sin and Satan : yet, the strife will cease !
 " The journey shortly end ! The race be o'er !
 " The crown be won ! With lasting gratitude
 " Let thy breast glow, for that direction true,
 " 'Mid a dark world—the Book of God ! 295

When joy

" O'erwhelms, in vortex-like, thy dizzy mind,—
 " Makes every sound harmonious, every form
 " Appear in vernal beauties ; lest the draught
 " Intoxicate, and hurry on thy feet
 " To join the evil throng, who share the Gift 300
 " Unmindful of the Giver ; humbly turn
 " To that assemblage of all heavenly things,
 " Wisdom and righteousness, and mark the end
 " Of those, who, in prosperity, forget
 " The God that made them and whose bounteous hand
 " Sent them their every blessing. And when grief
 " Presses thy spirit to the earth, still fly
 " To the same FOUNTAIN OF ALL KNOWLEDGE GOOD,
 " Its words shall sooth thy cares, remove thy doubts
 " Allay thy sorrows, level make thy path, 310
 " Cheerful thy life, thy death serene, thine end
 " Eternal glory !

There shalt thou behold

" In all dilemmas the right road to take :—
 " In every state what duties rise, what deeds,

" Meet th' applauding look of Heaven, what course 315
 " The weary and way-faring man may tread :
 " This, ever prize ! So shall thy mind delight
 " To seek thy people's benefit and strive
 " To do all good, thy law be equity ;
 " And whilst thou guide the sceptre, wear the crown,
 " Thine eye behold, unmoved, the gaudy scenes
 " Of pomp and splendour, and this truth remain,
 " Stamp'd on thy heart—that Life a shadow is,
 " A passing show, a meteor, seen awhile
 " In gorgeous hues, but, fleeting as the light
 " That from the dancing wave gives the sun's image. 325

" But there are those who venture to reject
 " This only Light which ever earth received—
 " The Lamp which God in mercy to mankind
 " Sent to direct their feet, to glad their hearts,
 " To warn them of an everlasting state : 330
 " With lofty spirits such may feign to spurn
 " The pearl that has no price, may laugh in health,
 " May triumph in prosperity, may lean
 " Upon perverted reason, and strive hard
 " To think themselves secure ; but they will find 335
 " A reed their pillar, for the time shall come,
 " (If lull'd not by insensibility,)
 " When all their confidence will fail, their hearts
 " Shrink with dismay, and Death in terrors dress'd
 " Beckon with awful front, whilst all their sins 340
 " In dread procession move before their eyes,

“ Unpardon'd, at that hour—when the whole world
“ Would be exchanged for hope. In vain for such
“ The broad and sapphire gates of Heaven were spread;
“ They all refused to enter, they adored 345
“ The mammon of the world ; tho' light had reach'd
“ This dark benighted sphere, they prized it not—
“ THEIR DEEDS WERE EVIL !

More must I declare.

“ There is a world of wretchedness and pain,
“ Far in blank space, where the distemper'd man, 350
“ Confined by adamantine bars, 'mid flames,
“ Stretches his tortured limbs, and writhes, and groans—
“ Hell's only music ! where incessant rise
“ Sulphureous clouds, that spread around one night,
“ Through whose thick mists the lightnings may not pierce
“ When the loud thunders rattle. Here abide
“ Offending souls, men who on earth abhor'd
“ All holiness, and in despite of Heaven
“ Walk'd wickedly, nursing rebellious thoughts.

“ All hateful things are here and venomous, 360
“ Such as no tongue can name—tort'ring the frame ;
“ Yet these may be endured, but, one there is,—
“ One furious foe, whose fang gnaws at the heart,—
“ CONSCIENCE ! Her wrath no bribe can stay, no force,
“ Ward her assault ; but terrible she looks, 365
“ And, to the man who fain would sleep, afresh
“ Goads, and to his retreating eye, presents,
“ Of earthly crimes, a catalogue, all black ;

" Yet not a word she speaks, but evermore

" Points to the past !

Yet, Beings, who endure 370

" The deepest agony, are not whom earth

" Call'd most diseased, impious and wicked men ;—

" It is the unjust King, the Governor,

" Whatever name he bare, who, call'd to rule,

" Flies from his trust, and for himself believes 375

" All things were made—his will preeminent—

" Sole favourite of Heaven. Here do they find,

" Their error, and in unavailing sighs

" Fill th' infernal elements.

But thoughts

" And images like these, draw not the heart 380

" By the sweet cords of love. These suit the fierce

" And untamed spirit, but, who progress make

" In holiness and in the life divine,

" Can act from love : for should our Heavenly Sire

" From terror be obey'd, to whom we owe 385

" Such blessings infinite ?—when all that lives,

" And all that is, within us and around,

" With voice most audible, to the mind's ear,

" Speak of his boundless goodness ? God is Love !—

" First and most holy of immortal truths ! 390

" What spirit pure can doubt it ?

Where is he,

" Who, in the silent solitary hour,

" When meditation reigns, can look around

" On all life's wondrous host of things, and doubt,

- " The love of Him who made them ? Every form 395
 " Throughout all nature, opes its hundred mouths
 " To furnish man with arguments to sound
 " His Maker's praise ; for not on man alone,
 " God heaps his favours, from th' o'erflowing spring
 " Of heavenly goodness, earth's vast family 400
 " Drink their refreshing draughts. Th' Eternal Sire,
 " Fountain of love ! smiles most beneficent
 " Upon his creatures, when they most rejoice,
 " And groan beneath the weight of happiness.
 " Sun of the Universe ! He looks around, 405
 " And where he looks, spontaneous pleasures rise
 " And melting harmonies ! What less than God
 " And goodness infinite, could bid the train
 " Of beauteous colours grace this lower earth ?
 " Could make its secret caverns, and the host 410
 " Of vegetable forms, conspire to swell
 " Man's sum of blessings ? What but Power supreme—
 " Omnipotent, direct the countless orbs
 " Of Heaven to shine, unvarying, ever sure,—
 " Sole emblem of stability on earth ?— 415
 " Rolling th' eternal course !—What less than God,
 " All good, call up the seasons in their round ?
 " And give to life, interminable limits ;
 " Bidding the air above, the earth beneath,
 " The ocean, teem with creatures who exist 420
 " (Unconscious of existence) their brief hour,
 " And best display their unknown gratitude
 " In being happy ?—Doubt not God is love !

“ And when thou turnest thine admiring eye
“ From GOD IN NATURE, to that vast expanse, 425
“ Dimming the sight, where e’en th’ angelic mind
“ Is lost in wonder—GOD IN PROVIDENCE
“ How perfect and more visible the love !
“ Tho’ Angels see, but part—of the great plan
“ Which guides the Universe, the meanest man
“ (If that can be called mean, which hath the germ 430
“ Of immortality) shall see enough,
“ If willing to behold, to cheer his heart
“ And make him trust, that that Almighty Hand,
“ So visible in seasons numberless,
“ Will still conduct him, ’till he reach that place 435
“ Where faith expires in sight. How should thy soul
“ Expand with gratitude for that best gift—
“ Immeasurably vast ! priceless as great !—
“ THE HOPE OF AN HEREAFTER ; the belief,
“ Founded on God’s good word, that thou wilt yet 440
“ Survive the wreck of Nature, and enjoy
“ The Father of thy spirit, in a world
“ Where blessedness shall dwell, where Christ shall reign,
“ Where sin shall be no more, and God Himself
“ Shall wipe the final tear from every eye ! 445

“ And can that God whose attribute is love—
“ Whose whole creation teems with happiness,
“ Delight in morbid feelings, and the heart
“ That ever pores o’er something, undefined—
“ All miserable ? Can our Heavenly Sire,

“ Well pleased, behold the creatures he has made
“ Cherish suspicions of Himself, and tho’
“ Nurs’d in the lap of comfort, all pass by,—
“ To languish o’er ideal miseries ;
“ Or, mourn some distant and extraneous ill,— 455
“ Insect by insect torn, or the fierce blast
“ Whose unconceived and death-devoting ire
“ Half wither’d in its course—the polar Bear,
“ Howling to darkness ? Gratitude is sweet !
“ Man loves it, and the offering God approves. 460
“ He asks, for all his countless benefits,
“ No hard return—the mind to thankfulness
“ Tuned, and a cheerful heart—best evidence
“ Of hidden virtues !—Murder never smiles !
“ But cheerfulness the Christian most becomes ! 465
“ Why should the man whose heart aspires to God,
“ Who walks by faith, who hath communion sweet
“ With holy spirits—the promise of this life
“ And that which is to come ; why should his heart
“ Be sorrowful ? Let terror shake their frames 470
“ Who have no God to trust in ! Let those men
“ On melancholy brood and never taste
“ Of cheerfulness, who, ’mid the storms of life,
“ Behold no heavenly Pilot ; who survey
“ Confusion and thick clouds, looking, dismay’d, 475
“ O’er the dark chaos of conjecture, chain’d
“ To earth and earthly hopes ; but let the men
“ Who seek another and abiding rest—
“ A heavenly country, smile, for all is theirs,

“ Or life, or death, things present, things to come. 480
“ Such should rejoice, and ever in their face
“ Display content and gladness, sorrowing not,
“ Save for an erring world, and that their hearts
“ So seldom rise ’bove this sublunar sphere,
“ So seldom know the burden of that joy, 485
“ Christians should feel—Heirs of Eternal Life !

“ But tho’ benevolence rules all that is,
“ For needful purposes, as yet unknown,
“ There is a certain residue of ill 490
“ Ever to dwell on earth, tho’ good men strive
“ To check its growth, as well befitteth them.
“ It is an evil world ! this will be found
“ Whatever fairy schemes of happiness
“ Men fondly shape. But tho’ Perfection, Earth 495
“ Can ne’er attain, shall not her Sons aspire
“ Near to approach as may be ? Shall they fail
“ To cross some limpid stream, because no foot
“ Hath e’er the ocean forded ?

Many ills, 500
“ And of gigantic shapes, stalk through the earth,
“ Not needful, but the effect of those who guide
“ The stream—Authority ! yet turn it not
“ To fertilize the mead, but, bid it lave
“ The desert, where all noxious verdure thrives. 505
“ Therefore, hereafter, heavier is the hand
“ Of God upon them,—making e’en the Murd’rer,
“ Forgetful of his own consuming pangs,

" Stand by and pity.

Yet, rejoice to hear !

" If greater be the punishment of those 510

" Who power perverted, so felicities,

" 'Bove all their race, in yonder starry sphere

" Wait to reward them, if on earth they ruled

" In equity, and well discharged the trust

" Of their high state. For punishments are dealt,

" In the approaching world, not to the men,

" With strictest recompence, who most of ill

" Did in their day, but to those unjust Stewards,

" Who might have good perform'd ; on every side

" Hearing the calls of duty, yet who spurn'd 520

" The bold intruder, and in selfishness

" Wrapt themselves round. For circumstances prove,

" Alone, the man.

ALFRED ! be thou resolved

" Well to perform thy part ; and ever know

" From whence assistance comes. Be this thy name,—

" The Father of thy People ! Cherish worth !

" Where talent is, turn it to good ! Prevent,

" With Power's strong arm, all violence to men,

" All cruelty to brutes :—for God beholds,

" With a paternal eye, his lowest works, 530

" And hath appointed for th' unfeeling heart

" Deep and peculiar punishments. Delight

" To see the poor man smile ! soften his wants !

" For Poverty the Parent is, of crimes,

" And many vices, which from Heaven will find. 535

" Lenient remark ; whilst those—the true offenders !
 " Who, with the wretched, brotherhood disclaim'd,
 " Standing aloof, viewing the gaunt foe—Want
 " Assail their dwelling ; striving not to rouse
 " Virtue's dim spark within them ;—leaving thus, 540
 " Immortal souls, through their dark way to grope,
 " Unfriended, uninform'd ; shall find of God—
 " Just recompence !

A good King happiest feels
 " To see his People happy !—such be thou !
 " Instruct the ignorant ; and, as the spring— 545
 " The source of best instruction, spread the sound
 " Salvation dealt to man ! Give them the food,
 " God hath appointed ! This shall cure the ill,
 " When all things fail ! Do these and thou shalt join,
 " After due course, the new Jerusalem,—
 " Transporting thought ! Yes even thou shalt join,
 " With each of the redeemed of the Lord, 550
 " Th' innumerable company of Angels !
 " The gen'ral Church, and the first-born of Heaven !
 " The God of all ! the Spirits of Just Men,
 " Made perfect ! and the Mediator—CHRIST !

" If thou would'st other knowledge know, declare ! 555
 " For I am sent to caution and inform".
 The King thus seem'd to say. " Bright Messenger !
 " Communicant of holy mysteries !
 " Thou hast my praise ! Angel immortal, hail !
 " I would inquire, with due humility, 560

“ The nature of thy office, and what good
 “ Thou hast bestow’d on me.” To whom the Angel.

“ Favour’d of God ! unnumber’d are the pits,
 “ Some seen, but most unseen, which throng life’s path,
 “ And send the unsuspecting traveller 565
 “ To his long home. Many hast thou escaped,
 “ Not of thyself, for thou hast often rush’d
 “ ’Mid thickest dangers, but, thy heart was right,
 “ Thou trusted’st in thy God, and I upheld,
 “ By Him commission’d, thine unguarded feet, 570
 “ Through perils, that thou little knewe’st of.

“ Deep and mysterious are the ways of Heaven !
 “ Faintly perceived by us, to thee, all dark.
 “ One thing thou yet may’st know, for ’tis reveal’d
 “ By Moses and the Prophets, tho’ unseen 575
 “ By all, whose hearts, whose eyes, Mammon, accurst !
 “ Hath dimm’d and harden’d.—He who trusts in God,
 “ Shall yet rejoice.

 In journeying through this world,
 “ Dangers on every side stand thick ; man’s eye
 “ Cannot descry them ! under streams they are, 380
 “ And beds of roses, in the verdant mead—
 “ The desert waste—the city populous ;—
 “ And in the small hut, by the mountain’s side—
 “ On hills and in the valleys. All alike
 “ Stand open to the wrathful enemy 585
 “ That lurks unseen. Such is the earthly race,

" All men must run, exposed at every step
 " To sorrows infinite, and pain, and death.
 " But there is one defence, and one alone.
 " The Maker of the world and all therein, 590
 " Hath so ordain'd, that he whose heart implores
 " Celestial guidance, shall from him receive
 " A Guardian, like to me, whose keener eye,
 " From real, not apparent harm, shall lead
 " The faithful suppliant, and at last conduct 595
 " O'er Death's dark gulf to Heaven.

For, round this world,
 " Tho' unperceived, there stands a depth profound,
 " Far wider than the eye may stretch, the Gulf
 " Which earth divides from the eternal state !
 " Yet, that the shivering soul may not despair, 600
 " We ministering Spirits, sent of God,
 " Stand at the verge, and all who rightly ask
 " Receive our free assistance, and are borne
 " Where sorrow is not ; but the men who trust
 " Their native strength, and, proud of heart, rely 605
 " On their own worth or wisdom, find, too late !
 " Their folly, and to wretchedness descend
 " Swifter than shooting star. Who would believe
 " On such conditions, men would rather die,
 " Than live, yet such it is.

But I would now, 601
 " Further inform thee. Through th' appointed path
 " All men must run, in this their earthly race,
 " Evil full often seems the better thing,

- " And good the evil. By th' immortal laws
" This is ordain'd, to teach poor erring man 615
" The penalty of crimes—virtue's high worth,
" And from experience, fruitful source of light,
" By slow progression, to instruct the heart
" Where wisdom lies.
" Some pitfalls are to death, 620
" Some quicken foresight, and awake the prayer
" For better guidance. Ever then at hand,
" We are, to yield our aid invisible.
" And often do we lead, dissatisfied,
" Men from their certain bane, or, half permit 625
" Their feet to fall, to loosen that deep root
" Of self-dependence, all men love so well.
" The deadliest poisons oft are found to dwell
" With flowers most fair, to come within whose breath
" Rouses the pestilence, and sinks the heart 630
" To that worst state—Insensibility!
" Where the soul groans, yet learns not to be wise.
" Then is our virtue tried. We know the path,
" That death attends it, and full often lead
" Weak man from ruin, whilst he thinks it hard 635
" To see the flattering good, yet, turn away.
" And often do we find it right, to lead
" Through crooked ways and brambles, 'mid steep hills,
" And pathless valleys, to escape some harm
" Unseen, but more severe, that lead to death. 640
" From infancy our exercise begins.

" We tend the infant from the hour it breathes,
" 'Till reason dawns, or, wretched were the state
" Of helpless childhood. In its tender years
" What evils lurk to whelm it in the grave ! 645
" But we, with most especial earnestness,
" Ever surround, ward off each secret foe,
" And feed the intellectual spark, ere long
" To shine abroad, and in the face of man
" Picture the Deity.

Now will I speak 650

" Of my appointment, and the services
" I have perform'd for thee.
Thy Guardian I,
" Constant have succour'd thee, in hours so dark,
" They seem'd desertion ; but th' Almighty Sire
" Then loved thee most, and led thee in the way,
" Best suited to secure thy better part— 655
" Thy soul hereafter. Thou with thy whole power
" Has sought Him, and implored His ministry
" From youth, 'till now, and tho' God often hides
" The secret purpose of his ways to man,
" And makes him walk by faith, yet I am now, 660
" Permitted to assume a character,
" Clear to thine organs, to declare the ways
" Thou hast been led in, that thy heart may learn
" More truly to confide in Heaven.

When youth 665

" Gave to thee reason, I with heighten'd joy
" Perceived thy heart implore that better guide,

" All need, tho' few require, and still remain'd
 " Thy guardian Spirit. Little dost thou know
 " What benefits and untold blessings spring 670
 " From such dependence. Spirits like myself
 " Space cannot stop, but where we wish to be,
 " There do we stand ! And sometimes when engaged
 " In shouting loud Hosannas, 'mid the choir
 " Of Angels and Archangels, I have seen 675
 " Perils await thee, and beside thee stood,
 " Directing ! whilst the sluggish sun-beam bright,
 " Toil'd after me.—Such is an Angel's speed !

" Nor deem it strange that one like me should bound
 " His narrow influence ; for, all the Orders 680
 " Of high Intelligencies, progress make
 " Toward Love's pure spring, ebullient with each good ;
 " Whose radiant waters all the holy Spirits
 " Drink ever, and delightful visions feel,—
 " The heart expanding ; making each endure 685
 " For all that is, divinest sympathy,
 " And more intense benevolence. High Heaven
 " All hath appointed by gradations meet
 " To run this race, and by steps infinite
 " Move toward perfection. Thus material beings, 690
 " Love first their friends, their country, the whole world,
 " Preparing thus their minds for nobler views—
 " Their wings for higher flights : and last of all,
 " Archangels, toiling still, and still to toil
 " In this most glorious exercise, adore— 695

" The drop, the stream, and last of all approach,

" Nearer, tho' ever distant, the pure spring,

" The Fountain of all Love.

Now will I say

" What benefits thou hast received from me. 700

" Gifted with prescience of thy future life,

" I saw thy dangers, and with anxious care

" Sought to avert them, or, alike, improve

" All to thy good. I saw thy furious foe,

" IVAR of Denmark (ere he pass'd the seas 705

" To ravage Britain) slay the Mariner

" Beside the waves, and bade th' illusions rise

" To vex his spirit, tried and exercised,

" So from him to extort the vow, that saved

" In after times thy Queen. These visions rose 710

" Consistent with his own dark prejudice !

" For, to believe the possibility

" Is half to see the thing believed. Doubt not,

" That I, ALSWITHA thus should serve, for know,

" The Guardian Angel, may at times confer 715

" With other Angels ; and provide for one

" As I, for her, by laws to thee unknown.

" I saw thee in that depth of wretchedness,

" When by the mountain brook, thou badest go

" Thy troops to SELWOOD, and across the heath 720

" Bore thy young Child—ALSWITHA by thy side,

" Mournful and destitute. I led thy feet

" To neighbouring Abbey, I impell'd thee thence

" To seek the cōttage, where, when thou hadst heard
 " Of Glastonbury fallen, and resolved 725
 " To war again; thou swore'st! and, that oath—
 " By the Eternal God!" Word utter'd not,
 " By Angels, but with veiling of the face!—
 " Pause ever at that name!

" For wise designs
 " The Abbey walls were rased—the mad Dane sent
 " To waste, but, 'mid the terrors of the sight,
 " Thy Queen I safe conducted, and, at length,
 " Gave her a weeping Captive to that foe—
 " Beloved of Heaven,—the man, who now shall shine,
 " Great in all virtues. Thus, adoring view 735
 " Th' Almighty hand, that in the tempest moves!—
 " In storms and in the whirlwind, perfecting
 " His great designs! for as the Heavens are high
 " Above this lower earth, so are His thoughts
 " Above our thoughts, His ways above our ways. 740

" That she thy Queen a Captive should become,
 " By Heaven's all-seeing eye, needful was deem'd
 " To try thy faith,—her own—discord to raise
 " Within the danish camp; (for 'tis ordain'd
 " Before a people fall, that first shall rise 745
 " The Fiend Dissention) and, at last, convert
 " GUTHRUM the Dane. Hence when affliction hangs
 " Heavy upon thee, doubt not the design,
 " As sent in mercy. I the Saxon's foot,
 " Directed to approach thy Child, and 'mid 750

“ The trackless waste, sent him—by the same road
“ Thyself had trod, to obscure cottage low.
“ In hour of sadness I thy footstep led,
“ Where that old man the Hermit walk’d, and gave
“ Soft words of honey to his tongue, to cheer 755
“ Thy languid breast, and rouse the dormant spark
“ Of faith within thee. I the mother sent—
“ That aged woman, by the forest’s verge
“ To tell her tale, and as thou listen’d’st sad,
“ Ivar pass’d on unseeing thee. So him, 760
“ Who stops to hear the tale of misery,
“ Blessings shall follow! I attended thee
“ When known but to thyself. I clear’d thy path
“ From many perils; in the green-wood shade,
“ And when thou soughtest Ivar’s camp, I round
“ Hover’d incessant;—in thy mind call’d up
“ The thought that saved thee,—to assume the man,
“ Smitten of God;—and from thy ready tongue,
“ Pronounced wild words.
“ But now the time came on
“ That needed my best power, the day of fight. 780
“ I sought thee in the battle! I beheld
“ Each lurking danger that beset thy path,
“ And o’er thy head my unseen helmet cast.
“ And I will still be with thee; I will lead
“ Thy feet in pleasant paths. Whilst thy heart loves
“ Thy Friend and Maker, He will give me charge
“ To follow thee, and thou shalt to the world
“ Shine forth resplendent, and shalt shew mankind

"How beautiful the feet of him that walks

"In Zion's ways.

"Now must I bid adieu!

790

"The mem'ry of these words, preserve through life!

"So in the hour of death shalt thou behold

"Again thy GUARDIAN ANGEL."

With his mind

Fill'd by the heavenly vision, ALFRED woke.

END OF BOOK XXIII.

ALFRED. BOOK XXIV.

ARGUMENT.

BAPTISM of Oddune and his followers ; Interview of Alfred and Alswitba with their infant Child ; The King's last address to his troops.

THE morning star, faint in the western sky,
Had now retired, when to the royal tent
ODDUNE advanced and said, "The Dane awaits."
And now, before the King, GUTHRUM appear'd,
Leading his daughter, whom the Queen approach'd, 5
And, hand in hand, led gently on, to share
The private converse; whilst her Sire drew near,
And ALFRED thus address'd:

"Most noble Prince!

"Thy frown I could have borne, but thou, this heart

"Hast conquer'd by thy kindness. I am one 10

"Who ever thought his oath inviolate,

"And soon, from purer principles, will keep

"That oath to God more firm,—when next I swear

"Thou art my Monarch!
 "Yester night I sought
 "Our neighbouring castle, where, the anxious Danes
 "Look'd for me sad, and on each passing breeze
 "Fancied they saw my spirit; such belief
 "Had they that I was slain: and tho' I came,
 "And in mine own and proper shape appear'd,
 "They question'd their own sight, half prone to say,
 "Impostor! GUTHRUM is no more! I now
 "Declared thy conduct, all thy noble words:
 "How thou forgavest me, and for my sake
 "Promis'd to pardon them. I told them more—
 "Of the religion I had late profess'd: 35
 "In my best way explain'd its influence;
 "The power it had to tame the mind, and make
 "The jarring world one family of love.
 "I pointed out our foster'd hopes, how low
 "Compared with thine. I named the Christian's joy,
 "How pure his character—how great his deeds,
 "And for the certain test appeal'd to thee.
 "They heard me, wondering, and, oh King rejoice!
 "Join in my rapture when to thee I say,
 "They vow'd to be thy subjects, here to dwell 45
 "Beneath so brave a Prince. But, more I say,
 "They seek to become christians, earnestly,
 "With genuine zeal, and now without this tent
 "Thirty brave Chieftains stand,¹ anxious to shew,

¹ Aulre was the name of the village, in Somersetshire, where Guthrum and thirty of his leaders were baptised. Asser says, Alfred himself assisted at their baptism.

“ Their gratitude, and to partake with me, 50
 “ And her, my daughter, whom thy hand hath saved,
 “ The rite baptism.”

ALFRED, glad, replied:

“ Firm is my trust in thee, and on thy faith
 “ I take thy fellows. They with thee shall share
 “ The holy ordinance; and if their hearts, 55
 “ Kindness may reach, a happier race, the sun,
 “ Shall never visit. Tell them to repair,
 “ Where silver THONE² meandering glides along,
 “ And be thou with them. There shall you meet me.”

Forth to the river's brink they pass'd along; 60
 Whilst all the multitude of Saxons gazed
 In silent admiration. Now the King,
 Stately and slow, drew near, whilst follow'd him,
 The Queen, conducting to the ritual stream,
 The danish Maiden. Lowly on the ground 65
 She look'd, her steps were timid, and her form
 Graceful, and chaste her eye. Musing she walk'd.
 When ALFRED with commanding aspect, slow,
 Descended to the water's brink, and call'd
 Each warrior Dane, the Maiden and her Sire, 70
 Whom, solemn, he address'd:

“ GUTHRUM ! and you
 “ Who thus surround me, you are now about
 “ To make profession of a faith divine.

² A river in Somersetshire.

" It is no little thing, thus to profess
 " The christian convert. He who comes to God 75
 " Must own him such, and from his inmost soul,
 " Desire his teaching. Pure the God we serve,
 " And he demands the heart! You must renounce,
 " Ere you can be accepted—Envy—Wrath,
 " Revenge, and every evil way. Your souls 80
 " Must feel, for all men, love, and view mankind,
 " As children of one parent, who demands,
 " Each friendly office, and the fervent prayer
 " That those who know him not, yet may be taught.
 " And as the way most certain to obtain 85
 " Favour from Heaven,—receive his holy word,
 " Soon to be laid before your wondering eyes,
 " Which tells us all things, needful to be known,
 " And, to felicity, points the sure path.
 " There will you learn how God all merciful, 90
 " Pitied degenerate men, and to release
 " Their race from bondage, sent his Son, inspired,
 " With the full burden of Divinity
 " To tell of sacred things, and to direct
 " All men aright; so to escape the woes, 95
 " And penal fires, which disobedient souls
 " Must feel hereafter, if they live and die,
 " Estranged from God and from all holiness.
 " If from thy conscience, GUTHRUM! thou canst say,
 " This faith is mine," and you who round me stand,
 " And Maiden, thou!—Bend and receive the wave!"
 All bent devoutly, pressing their full hearts,

Declaring trust in Christ.

And as they stood,
There came a sudden pause. No word was heard!
No low and passing sound woke the still scene, 105
But all was silent—waves, and earth, and air;
And each of the unnumber'd multitude,—
Gazing around, felt such a solemn hush,
All things pervade, and seem'd so sensible
Of His dread presence—His, the God of all! 110
That each, seem'd to himself to shrink to nought,
And his own insignificancy feel
As never he had felt.—As doth that man
Who, in a musing hour, wanders beside
The white and roaring ocean, when its waves, 115
Conflicting lash the shore; and all around,
Far as the black horison, shews one scene,
Terrific, vast, which to his mind calls up
The wrath of Deity.—Then, when he thinks,
Viewing the world of waters, on himself, 120
And seems to say—to every grain of sand—
“Thou art my brother!”

Having left the tide,
The King to his new converts thus began:
“Behold in me your Sov'reign! view your friend!
“For I am he. Now shall you all behold 125
“In ALFRED a Protector! one whose heart,
“Remembering not the past, with growing care,
“Plans for your good, and who will ever seek,
“How best to make you happy. I will hence

"Provide due lands,³ and you shall comforts share, 130

"With us, in common. GUTHRUM! thou art dear

"As any man to me, and thou shalt find

"My words substantial, thou shalt hence enjoy

"Truly, thy Monarch's favour." GUTHRUM sought,

In vain for utterance, he could only say, 135

"Thy God be mine!"

Then to the danish Maid,

Who pensive stood, the Queen advanced and cried,

"Sister beloved! my heart hath room for thee.

"Ere this, thy friendship has been proved, and now,

"Mine shall appear, later, but not less true." 140

The Damsel press'd her hand, yet spake not.

When

A messenger approach'd and cried, "Oh King!

"An aged pair, with one, a child, now wait

"In yonder tent to see thee." ALFRED's heart,

Leap'd, yet he spake not: whilst the Queen turn'd pale

At the glad news, and would have rush'd to meet them,

But, mindful of her dignity, she moved,

Stately along, whilst her heart throbb'd with joy,

'Till where no eye beheld her, when she sped,

Rapid and light as doth the passing shadow

Of the wild sea-bird o'er the curling waves. 150

Now to the tent she came. She saw her Child!—

Herlong-lost Child! She sprang! She clasp'd him round!

He knew her face, and with his little hands

His mother press'd. "My Child! my Child!" she cried,

³ Alfred gave the whole of East-Anglia to Guthrum and his followers.

The tear gush'd forth, and in her arms she held,
Silent, her Child.

The King had GUTHRUM sent—
Him and his daughter and the danish Chiefs,
To the near castle, greetings to convey
And lasting peace; and now with hasty step
Approach'd the tent with all a father's warmth, 160
Leaning on ODDUNE.

At the door he saw
ACCA, and rushing through the company,
Exclaim'd, "Where art thou?" In his mother's arms
He saw his Child, and with transporting joy
Received him, and, appealing to high Heaven, 165
Cried, "This our consummation! This the point
"For which our hearts have sigh'd. Mild Innocent!
"With other thoughts do I behold thee now,
"Than when I left thee! Thou art hence released
"From dangers and thick perils, and shalt dwell, 170
"Safe with thy parents cherish'd by their care.
"Go, lovely Boy! go to thy mother's arms,
"And there be happy!"

Turning, near, he saw,
The rustic Pair from Ethelney and cried,
"I greet you, friends! CEOLRIC, welcome here! 175
"And ACCA, for thy faithfulness and love
"To this my Child, whose rosy cheeks declare
"Thy service—take my thanks! and thou shalt soon
"Receive a nobler gift. I do not yet
"Say thy reward, but thou ere long may'st hope, 180

" With this thy faithful husband, to possess
 " All good, which from the friendship of a King,
 " Reason may ask and gratitude bestow.⁴
 Lowly they bow'd. When ALFRED thus again:

" These are your sons! Brave and intrepid youths!
 " To own such parents might alone secure
 " My certain favour, but a higher claim
 " You boast—an independence, resting firm
 " Upon your own high merit. To your swords,
 " I owe my life! Ye gallant youths, expect 190
 " No sordid recompence! My thoughts are deeds!
 " Now for a while retire!" Forth they withdrew,
 Looking to Heaven, but language they had none!
 Theirs was the deep and fix'd astonishment—
 The glowing admiration, which requires, 195
 Not words but silence.

Looking round, the King
 Beheld, till then unseen, SIGBERT, and said:

" I joy to see thee! welcome at this hour
 " Of general joy! Thy spirit has endured,
 " Ere this, deep injuries, and thou hast oft 200
 " Lost thy due equipoise: But God hath said,
 " He sees our frame, He knows that we are dust!

⁴ " Alfred, soon after he was established on his throne, made Ceolric bishop of Winchester, the very Neatherd in whose house the king in his adversity was glad to hide himself. He found him a man of good wit, and parts capable of better employment; upon the return of his fortune therefore, he caused him to apply himself to learning, in which he so well answered the king's expectations, as that at last he made him a bishop, and used to advise with him about the weightiest affairs of the state."

" And I forgive thee, thou my favour hast.

" Yet do not think, that with forgetting ill,

" I lose the good—inj'ries I may forget, 205

" But favours cannot. SIGBERT, oft thy zeal

" Hath help'd me. Thou hast foremost stood, in hours,

" Trying, to do me service, and thy heart,

" I know is right! To thee do I ascribe

" Yon Infant's life—tidings of her thou seest— 210

" ALSWITHA, Heaven's best gift!"

SIGBERT look'd up,
When thro' his labouring mind, rush'd the quick thought,
As on the Queen he cast his eye, of her

Who on a former day, pleaded so well

The cause of pity. When the Queen drew near, 215

And cried, " I thank thee! Thou hast well perform'd

" A Subject's part, but that thou mett'st my Child

" And screened'st him from harm, thou hast my thanks

" Next after God.—I am thy friend indeed."

When thus the King:

" Doubtless now Peace, around,

" Hath spread her fostering wing, thy mind will back

" To its past channel turn; and I shall see,

" SIGBERT, as heretofore, not when he breath'd

" Threatenings and slaughter. So will I be found,

" A friend sincere; and thou shalt live beneath 225

" Thy Monarch's favour, and all good partake.

" To shew thee that thy services I prize,

" This my first confidence. On the south verge

" Of Selwood's forest, one, a Hermit dwells,

" Whom late I talk'd with. Seek his lone abode, 230
 " And lead him hither. He is one whom God
 " His Spirit hath pour'd out upon, and taught
 " Great truths. I need his converse! Princes stand,
 " Firmest and most secure, when round them throng
 " Good and enlighten'd men.⁵

" Near him abides,—
 " Thou knowest where! an aged woman; her
 " Whom we accosted, when the danish Chief
 " IVAR, to meet his brother, sped. Find out,
 " And tell her she may hope some better days—
 " Some solitary joys, if joys can reach 240
 " A heart, robb'd of its earthly heritage—
 " The child of her old age. Tell her the King
 " Designs her good! Do these small offices,
 " SIGBERT! and I mean time will plan for thee."

SIGBERT replied:

" The happiness this hour 245
 " Affords me, Heaven alone can judge! My heart
 " Throbs with transporting joys. That thou art safe—
 " That thou hast rescued this our native land,
 " From ravagers, fierce and unfeeling men;
 " And now art here; thou and thy Queen and Child!
 " Than this I need no other recompence."

Which said he pass'd the door.

" Now," cried the King,

⁵ Alfred rendered himself remarkable for the encouragement he gave to learning. The most learned men of Europe flocked to his court, and were uniformly received with distinguished honors.

- " ODDUNE, one word to thee. Friend! Counsellor!
" Let me my mind unburden at this hour,
" For full it is, o'erflowing. Visions bright 255
" Dance round me, and the scenes as yet unborn,
" Look fair. A secret whisper in mine ear
" Tells me the time is come, when I may see
" My people happy. I, their Monarch made,
" To do them good, and, from her hiding place, 260
" Call Virtue forth.—Shall e'er the hour arrive,
" When this my breast, glowing with great designs,
" Prosperity shall mildew? when mine eyes,
" Weary of seeing good, shall turn to view
" Evil and love it? Shall the moment come, 265
" When, heedless of past sorrows, I shall stand
" Giddy with praise?—with flattery lifted high,
" And to myself ascribe these benefits?—
" Forsake me not—Father of Heaven and Earth!
- " With other than the boaster's heart, I say,— 270
" Fléd are our foes, as were the morning mists
" When the Sun rose. Britain is now releas'd
" From the fierce Dane, and every scene around,
" Smiles on me. After looking up to God,
" Whose arm upheld us, can I thee behold, 275
" Nor think of thy deserts? In every toil
" Perplexity and care, my constant stay,
" Whose words have cheer'd me, whose advice hath served
" Whose sword protected, and whose name alone
" Made the invaders tremble. Honor'd friend! 280

" Idle it were to say, thy happiness
 " Close is allied to mine! To do thee good,
 " Constant, shall be my care, and to reward
 " Thy nameless services. But thou wilt find,
 " Thy Monarch's gratitude, great as it is, 285
 " And all his benefits, a trifling good,
 " Compared with that full consciousness within,
 " Of duties, vast and trying, well discharged.—
 " Most precious feeling! such as I would hope,
 " One day to know myself—my dying day." 290

ODDUNE replied, " The joy which now I feel,
 " Thou must not doubt, at seeing thee, oh King!
 " Raised from thy abject state, and on thy throne
 " Establish'd, long I trust to rule these realms.—
 " Rate not my merit thus! My soul was roused 295
 " By thy example. Thou my spirit taught'st
 " To scorn oppression, and the ravenous bands
 " That scourged our Isle. I dream'd, as others dream'd
 " 'Till thou appearedst, and the latent spark,
 " Bade blaze within me. Dormant had I lain, 300
 " And all our race,—dishearten'd, but for thee!"

When ALFRED thus: " My words must now be few.
 " Hereafter will I tell thee many things.—
 " Ere from this memorable plain we pass
 " To seek our homes, once more will I address 305
 " My gallant troops. ALSWITHA by my side,
 " With this her Child, shall stand; and ODDUNE, thou!

"Then for my last address."

The Queen arose,
And with her infant Boy, majestic,
Moved toward the troops. Whilst ALFRED and the Chief;
ODDUNE, walk'd after her. The Herald spake,
When instant, near their King, his Subjects throng,
And all was silence.

Loftier than the rest,
Stood ALFRED. On one side the Queen appear'd,
Bearing her Child, and on the other ODDUNE; 315
While the vast host of Saxons, all around,
Intent, stood list'ning; when the King his arm
Raised and began.

"My Subjects, yet once more,
"I claim your patience! Much it cheers my heart,
"At this good hour, to mark that earnest look; 320
"Which tells me, what I say will not be lost.
"I would again, whilst near the field of fight,
"Speak to you from an overflowing heart,
"And name, what joys, what prospects, now we have;
"What evils are past by, and what is due 325
"To Heaven above, and ye His instruments.—

"Now is our Foe no more! The fearful clouds
"That o'er our head hung lowring, and with threats
"Of devastating fury, through the land,
"Spread terror and most ominous surprise;— 330
"Like midnight dreams are vanish'd, and the sun,
"In new and gorgeous splendour, decks himself!

“ Raise high your voices! With heart melody,
“ Sound the deep tones of gratitude! for now,
“ Danger is o’er! That blessing, which, to taste, 335
“ Our Fathers sought, yet to the grave went down,
“ And knew it not, that blessing—Peace is ours!
“ At death they trembled, not for their own sakes,
“ For they were good and faithful; but, they saw,
“ When leaving this low earth, the gathering cloud,
“ And fear’d for us their children. Cease to fear,
“ Ye holy martyrs! Honor’d shades, behold,
“ Our bands are broken, and Britannia’s soil,
“ Once more is free! Where is the languid heart
“ At such an hour? Where stands the man, whose breast
“ Feels not my transport? Where is he who views
“ What Heaven hath wrought, with black indifference?
“ He lives not to pollute the air! Your hearts,
“ Glow on your cheeks and glisten in your eyes!

“ Now to your homes, with souls elate, return, 350
“ Long left, but not forgotten! Now prepare
“ To call from crags, and caves, and forests deep,
“ Your frightened offspring and your trembling wives,
“ And prize the treasures ye have bled to save!
“ Now till your lands, nor fear th’ oppressor’s sickle
“ To share the produce! Rest your heads secure
“ From nightly plund’ers! and, when you return
“ From daily labour, fear not to behold,
“ Within your cottage door, the waster’s hand—
“ Th’ assassin’s spoil; for you shall dwell in peace. 360

" Look now upon your smiling Innocents,
 " Nor feel the horror of the thought, that these,
 " Rise up to taste your sorrows, and endure
 " Th' oppressive burden you have groan'd beneath,
 " For they shall reap where you have nobly sown! 360

" A fairer Isle than Britain, never Sun
 " View'd in his wide career! A lovely spot
 " For all that life can ask!—salubrious! mild!—
 " Its hills are green! its woods and prospects fair!
 " Its meadows fertile! and, to crown the whole 365
 " In one delightful word;—It is our home—
 " Our native Isle.

" Let us receive the boon
 " Which God hath given us, and, if future foes
 " Should dare invade our dwellings, once again
 " Stand forth to conquer; and, most manifest, 370
 " Make it to all the world, that we are brave,
 " And not more brave than free; who can respect
 " The rights of others and defend our own.
 " And if, in times hereafter, there should rise ⁶
 " Great foes and many, we may proudly hope, 375
 " Our Progeny, thinking of us their Sires,
 " Will rise vindictive, and th' Invader's spear
 " Trample in dust as we this day have done.

6 After the defeat of Ivar and Hubba, other parties of Danes arrived in England, but they were constantly defeated by Alfred, who in the latter part of his reign enjoyed an uninterrupted peace, having, by his valour as a general, and his talents as a legislator, raised his country to a pitch of happiness and glory; exhibiting to the latest generations, how much, under the most discouraging circumstances, may be accomplished by a wise and good king.

" Before we part, my Subjects! let me say,
 " With unfeign'd gratitude, the debt I owe 380
 " For constancy like yours. 'Mid troubles deep,
 " And hardships, such as never men endured,
 " You, uncomplaining, and unconquer'd, stood,
 " Foremost in every toil: and tho' you saw
 " Success far off, yet, patient were your looks, 385
 " And firm your hearts, and true, to me your King.
 " On this proud day, posterity shall dwell,
 " And when they talk upon past deeds, on you,
 " Heap praises, whilst the glorious sun on high
 " Makes their hearts glad.

" Now, Subjects! that your days
 " Comfort may yet attend,—one small return
 " Of me receive. Each man whose sword was drawn
 " In this his country's cause, and who requires
 " A safe and quiet home, shall soon possess,
 " Together with my smiles, a plot of land, 395
 " A cottage that shall every good contain,
 " And I will be your Father! I will rule
 " In mercy, and my thoughts, by night and day,
 " Shall be to serve you, and to make you feel
 " Protection and all joy."

Sudden there rose 400

A voice of admiration, indistinct ;—
 Sounding as doth the distant sea, for each
 Felt his heart leap and mutter'd the half prayer.
 When ALFRED thus again:

" Most gallant men!

" One moment more. My words have not been framed
 " To self-applause, nor hath my heart been taught
 " To see aught good, but from the hand of God.
 " When speaking of your valour and your might,
 " I know you but the instruments! On high
 " Dwells the great Ruler of all mortal things! 410
 " With him have we found favour! He it was
 " Who this deliverance wrought, who, by His hand
 " Unseen, made plain our path, and at this hour,
 " Gives us to triumph! He it was who screen'd,
 " Our heads in perils infinite! His arm 415
 " Fought on our side!—Saxons, with me rejoice!
 " But, to the God of Heaven be all the praise!"

The Monarch ended, when loud shouts arose;
 Than which, scarce louder, shake the troubled air,
 Far o'er the western tide, when gather'd clouds 420
 Hide the return of day; whilst Ocean raves,
 And equinoctial blasts assault the sky,—
 The sky returns the blast, with heighten'd powers
 To ravage and destroy; whilst waves on waves,
 In air commingling, fight for mastery;— 425
 'Till Nature in her throes and agony
 Brings forth the dread Tornado!

Each replied,
 " But to the God of Heaven be all the praise!"

ERRATA.

Page 185, line 19, for *nor* read *not*.

363, line 2, for *need's* read *need'st*.

